

The Quranic asbāb al-nuzūl material:  
an analysis of its use and development  
in exegesis

by



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## Abstract

Title:       The Quranic asbāb al-nuzūl material: an analysis of its  
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The genre of exegetical literature called asbāb al-nuzūl ("occasions of revelation") refers to certain reports adduced for various purposes within the overall interpretational framework of Quranic exegesis. The reports, identified generally by the mechanical device of inclusion of the phrase nazalat fī in the narrative, have been gathered together in four major texts: al-Wāḥidī (d. 468), al-ʿIrāqī (d. 567), al-Suyūṭī (d. 911) and the text falsely ascribed to al-Jaʿbarī. A detailed analysis of the exegesis of sūra 2 is undertaken in order to uncover the exegetical function of the sabab. The major conclusion of the study is that the primary aim of the asbāb information in exegesis is to create an edifying narrative in which an interpretation of a given Quranic verse may be embodied. Additionally, the material serves to establish the literary context, or boundaries of a given Quranic pericope, in which interpretation must take place. The reports also often supply information about the "pre-Islamic" background to a Quranic statement implying a means of measuring the value of the Islamic dispensation while also answering questions raised by the Qur'ān's brief allusions.

## Abstrait

Titre: Les asbāb al-nuzūl: leur emploi et développement  
dans l'exégèse coranique

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Le genre de la littérature exégétique intitulée asbāb al-nuzūl ("les occasionnelles de la révélation") s'adresse aux traditions spéciales qui ont été citées pour des raisons diverses dans l'exégèse coranique. Les traditions, distinguées par l'expression nazalat fī, sont recueillies en quatre traits notables: al-Wāḥidī (m. 468), al-ʿIrāqī (m. 567), al-Suyūṭī (m. 911) et pseudo-al-Jaʿbarī. J'ai fait une explication de texte de l'exégèse de sūra 2 pour découvrir les fonctions exégétiques du sabab. Ma première déduction de cette étude est que le sabab est une narration édifiante dans laquelle on peut trouver une interprétation du Coran. Aussi, le sabab forme le contexte littéraire dans lequel on doit faire l'interprétation. De même façon, les rapports donnent souvent des renseignements sur le fond pré-Islamique du Coran qui implique des moyens de mesurer la valeur de la réalisation Islamique, en même temps qu'ils éclaircissent les brèves allusions coraniques.



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# ABBREVIATIONS

b.	born
BSOAS	<u>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</u>
d.	died
EI <sup>1</sup>	M. Th. Houtsma (et al.), <u>The Encyclopaedia of Islam</u> [1st. edition]
EI <sup>2</sup>	H.A.R. Gibb (et al.), <u>The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition</u>
GAL	C. Brockelmann, <u>Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur</u>
GAL S	C. Brockelmann, <u>Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur</u> , Supplements
GAS	F. Sezgin, <u>Geschichte des Arabischen Schriftums</u>
GdQ	T. Nöldeke, F. Schwally, <u>Geschichte des Qorans</u>
HUCA	<u>Hebrew Union College Annual</u>
IOS	<u>Israel Oriental Studies</u>
JA	<u>Journal Asiatique</u>
JSS	<u>Journal of Semitic Studies</u>
Lane	E.W. Lane, <u>An Arabic-English Lexicon</u>
Q.	Qur'ān
QS	J. Wansbrough, <u>Quranic Studies</u>
REJ	<u>Revue des études juives</u>
RSO	<u>Rivista degli studi orientali</u>
SALP	N. Abbott, <u>Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri</u>
SEI	H.A.R. Gibb, J.H. Kramers, <u>Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam</u>
SM	J. Wansbrough, <u>The Sectarian Milieu</u>
ZDMG	<u>Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenlandischen Gesellschaft</u>

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That my father did not live to see the eventual acceptance of this thesis was a cruel and tragic turn of events. Thus, in loving memory of him, I finally offer this work.

## INTRODUCTION

In Susan Sontag's brilliant article "Against Interpretation", the following characterization of classical interpretation is given:

Interpretation is a radical strategy for conserving an old text, which is thought too precious to repudiate, by revamping it. The interpreter, without actually erasing or rewriting the text, is altering it. But he can't admit to doing this. He claims to be only making it intelligible, by disclosing its true meaning.<sup>1</sup>

The following study takes this basic understanding of the exegetical task as its starting point. From that understanding springs the consideration that there is a variety of methods which a given interpreter may use in order to "alter" his original text while still staying true to the text itself in the sense that the text always acts as the point of departure for the commentary. Within the context of Quranic exegesis one such method involves the citation of a certain piece of information which is called the sabab, the occasion or cause of revelation. To discover precisely why this material is adduced in exegesis and what is accomplished by doing so is the purpose of this study.

The following study may be summed up as an analysis of exegetical methodology and it is, therefore, essentially a literary study. The major questions which have formed the central concern of this work relate to the works written by Muslims, known under the category of works collecting asbāb al-nuzūl, their nature, composition and purpose as a whole as well as, more specifically, the use to which the material was put within the context of larger exegetical works in the early centuries of Islam. To

put the matter negatively, my concern here is not with source analysis, nor is it with historical analysis within the context of the books themselves, nor with the relevance the material may have in attempts to establish the 'chronology' of the Qur'ān, nor is it with the theological implications of the notion of asbāb al-nuzūl and questions related to the pre-existent Qur'ān; all these topics are without a doubt worthy of attention but they remain peripheral to this thesis.

This thesis has also limited its purview in the sense that only Arabic and primarily Sunnī works have been examined. This has been due primarily to considerations of length and practicality--it has been necessary to limit the works consulted to a reasonable number. It may be worth mentioning, however, that I have not been able to confirm the existence of an asbāb al-nuzūl book in Persian from the classical period other than the one anonymous work referred to by Storey in his bibliographical survey.<sup>2</sup>

Chapter I of this thesis, then, lays down the initial framework of the study, trying to clarify exactly what it is that is being studied, at least to the extent that such is possible through a simple presentation of the texts themselves and the technical terminology involved.

Chapter II deals with the theoretical position of the sabab as Muslims have conceived it; central here is the theoretical position of the exegetical value of the sabab--what exactly does it do, in theory, in exegesis? The theoretical theological problems implicit in the concept of the sabab, while a fascinating matter, have been deferred to another study.

Chapter III forms the bulk of the study by analyzing the asbāb material as it is documented for sūra 2 of the Qur'ān. Using a wide

selection of early exegetical works--of narrative, legal, abrogation and occasion of revelation genres--the analysis tries to explicate the exegetical procedures taking place in each verse in question.

Finally, Chapter IV assembles the conclusions of the thesis by collating the important elements which have been isolated in Chapter III. The study comes to the basic conclusion that the asbāb al-nuzūl material has its primary focus in creating an edifying narrative in which interpretation of a given Quranic verse may be embodied. The origins of the material would seem to be in popular discourse about the Qur'ān especially as practised by early story-tellers probably within the context of worship. Instances of use of the material within a legal context (ahkām, naskh) would seem to be secondary and derivative. One seeming legal context present in the asbāb information is found in those reports which provide exegetical information such that a given verse may be compared in its statement to a "pre-Islamic" (or pre-revelatory) condition. The citation of these reports does not, however, seem to provide relevant legal material, but rather creates a means by which the achievement of the Islamic dispensation may be measured, while, at the same time, provides answers for those with curious minds who want to know the full information about the "previous practices" to which the Qur'ān simply makes passing reference. In this way, the information is really only slightly different from the "edifying narrative" in that they both clearly originate in a story-telling environment. Additionally, the asbāb material serves to establish the context, or boundaries of a Quranic pericope, in which interpretation must take place; this is done by creating a unified narrative structure which spans over a whole pericope.

These conclusions represent a departure from the general understanding of the role of the sabab (which was usually seen to focus on chronology<sup>3</sup>) and represent a development of themes first elaborated in John Wansbrough's Quranic Studies: Sources and methods of scriptural interpretation and in his The Sectarian Milieu: Content and composition of Islamic Salvation History.

Indeed, the whole topic of exegetical methodology had not been broached to any great extent within the study of the Qur'ān until these works by Wansbrough appeared. My debt to these books will be apparent throughout this work, and, at several points, a knowledge of Wansbrough's methods will be assumed. Because of the inattention scholars of Islam have paid to exegesis, at places it has proven valuable to draw on work done especially in the study of Judaism--the works of Vermes, Loewe and Lowy are important in this regard.<sup>4</sup> A survey of relevant works on Islam which do impinge on this topic is concentrated at the beginning of Chapter III although other references are spread throughout.

. . . . .

A large number of names of Classical Muslim writers is given in the text. A footnote is devoted to a brief identification of such people along with references to standard biographical/bibliographical tools, at least where such details are available, at the first occurrence of each name; as well, if the person is the author of one of the major sources used in Chapter III, then more complete details will be given in the "Introduction to the Sources" in the third section of that chapter.



All the dates cited are according to the hijrī calendar unless stated otherwise; all Qur'ān verses are cited according to the so-called Egyptian text and reference is generally abbreviated as (e.g.,) Q. 2/106, that is Qur'ān Sūra 2, verse 106. Translations of all Arabic texts are my own unless otherwise indicated; this includes the Quranic passages where, however, reference has been made at times to the translations of Bell, Arberry and Yusuf Ali<sup>5</sup> for valuable assistance. Because of the rather large number of footnotes involved in this thesis, footnotes have been placed at the end of each chapter and at the end of the first three sections of Chapter III (that is, parts A, B, and C) and at the end of each verse analyzed in Chapter III D.

This dissertation, like so many others, has been written over a period of several years and in a variety of different places. This has resulted in access to different editions of texts at different times as has occurred most problematically in the case of al-Suyūṭī's al-Itqān. Reference to the bibliography will indicate where in the thesis a given edition of a text is being used.

Finally, it should be noted that for typographical convenience the sign 'ˆ' represents the letter 'ع' and a cedilla replaces the normal simple dot under those letters requiring such an indication.

## Notes to the Introduction

1. S. Sontag, "Against Interpretation", in her Against Interpretation, p. 6.
2. C. Storey, Persian Literature, a bibliographical survey, I 58, number 10.
3. See below Chapter III A for a full survey of previous scholarship.
4. Geza Vermes, Scripture and Tradition in Judaism; Raphael Loewe, "The 'Plain' meaning of Scripture in early Jewish exegesis", Papers of the Institute of Jewish Studies London, I (1964), 140-185; S. Lowy, The Principles of Samaritan Bible Exegesis.
5. Richard Bell, The Qur'ān Translated; A. J. Arberry, The Koran Interpreted; A. Yusuf Ali, The Holy Qur-an.

## CHAPTER I

### ASBĀB AL-NUZŪL

#### THE GENRE AND THE CONCEPT

ʿIlm asbāb al-nuzūl is one of the subdivisions of ʿilm al-tafsīr which deals with the transmission of the sabab of the revelation of a sūra or verse and the time, place and the like of its revelation. It is verified by the well-known principles of transmission from the pious ancestors [salaf]. Its goal is the precise rendering of these matters.<sup>1</sup>

Thus Ḥājī Khalīfa, the Ottoman bibliographer of the 11th century,<sup>2</sup> introduces his listing of books contained within the genre of asbāb al-nuzūl. That account of the genre has barely been exceeded in more recent scholarship; Ignaz Goldziher in his Die Richtungen der Islamischen Koranauslegung<sup>3</sup> finds occasion only once to mention the "classic" work of the type, that by al-Wāḥidī (d. 468),<sup>4</sup> and devotes absolutely no space to further consideration of the genre, let alone the exegetical role of such literature. The standard tome of Western scholarship, Nöldeke/Schwally, Geschichte des Qorāns, II: Die Sammlung des Qorāns, gives the most extended treatment known in the West:

The [exegetical] works going under the name asbāb al-nuzūl differ from the commentaries in that they contain only material relevant to the occasions of revelation. But since they constitute, from the point of view of both religious and literary history, the most important part of the commentary and since, here, the material is presented divested of all troublesome irrelevancies and thus neatly accessible and understandable in its own light, these books are worthy of investigation. It would seem, however, that Muslims have been slower to grasp this fact, or the number of known compositions of this type would not be so small. The Fihrist has only two. The author of the first,

Ḥusayn ibn abī Ḥusayn, is otherwise unknown; however, one should set no stock in the accuracy of the handwriting tradition with such names. The second work is rumoured to have been composed by ʿIkrima from the reports of Ibn ʿAbbās. However, in light of the dubious role that the cousin of the Prophet plays in Arabic literary history, this statement may be viewed with the greatest distrust. Al-Suyūṭī apparently knew no older book than that of ʿAlī ibn al-Madīnī (d. 234), an authority of al-Bukhārī. The most famous of this class of book comes, according to him, from ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī from Nīsābūr (d. 468); this text is also the oldest that is available in a printed edition. As the author makes clear in the preface, he regards the knowledge of the occasions of revelation as the basis of all exegesis and he pursues his purpose, against an increasing number of swindlers in his own time, to bring a science based on the study of tradition back to distinction again. The sources to which he refers are often biographical, exegetical and ḥadīth works. Whether in addition to these he made use of actual asbāb books can only be determined by a careful study of his numerous citations. Where he depends upon literary sources, he almost invariably adduces, in their entirety, the chains of witnesses. Deriving much from al-Wāḥidī's work is Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911) and his Lubāb al-nuqūl fī asbāb al-nuzūl. As the introduction boasts, this book is characterized by some noteworthy merits, amongst which is the omission of material given by al-Wāḥidī which does not strictly belong to the subject; instead he adds new material from ḥadīth works as well as commentaries, but--and this is most worthy of attention--not from any other asbāb works. He puts more value on making the literary sources which he used recognizable rather than on the isnāds and he also includes his opinion on the content of the traditions which he mentions. It is not therefore to be denied that this work represents a thoroughly useful complement to that of al-Wāḥidī, though we could well dispense with the last of the merits claimed by its author, namely, the harmonization of contradictory traditions.<sup>5</sup>

Another standard work, Régis Blachère's Introduction au Coran confines comment on the genre to a footnote,<sup>6</sup> actually confusing the matter rather than clarifying it, as will be explained below in Chapter III.

The limitations of such statements as that even of Nöldeke/Schwally will be immediately apparent to anyone who has looked closely at the texts themselves or even to anyone who has perused the various listings of manuscripts held in the libraries of the world and other bibliographical tools. The genre of asbāb al-nuzūl consists of substantially more texts than Nöldeke/Schwally list, although it must be admitted immediately that the quantity is not as plentiful as for example in al-nāsikh wa'l-mansūkh. The following list and discussion of texts has been culled from a variety of sources; undoubtedly more texts do exist, especially, I suspect, from the 12th century onwards. So, while this list makes no pretense at completeness, it does more fairly indicate the extent of the genre of literature, while at the same time allowing for some further clarification of the actual matter at hand.

1. 'Ikrima (d. 105),<sup>7</sup> Nuzūl al-Qur'ān, transmitted from Ibn 'Abbās;<sup>8</sup> listed in Geschichte des Qorāns as above, quoted from Ibn al-Nadīm's al-Fihrist.<sup>9</sup> As Nöldeke states, there is no reason to suppose that this work, even if it existed, would be truly ascribable to the (semi-) mythical Ibn 'Abbās,<sup>10</sup> or even 'Ikrima for that matter. No such manuscript has yet been located. The ambiguity of the title Nuzūl al-Qur'ān should be noted, too: what exactly does Ibn al-Nadīm mean when he classifies this work under this category? Is he really suggesting that the book recorded accounts of "occasions" of revelation or were they reports intended to document the process of revelation itself? Ibn al-Nadīm gives no evidence as to what

he conceived the contents to be but the evidence is far from conclusive that he is even trying to suggest that these were books of the (later) asbāb al-nuzūl genre.

2. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110),<sup>11</sup> Nuzūl al-Qur'ān; Nöldeke has this name as al-Ḥusayn ibn abī'l-Ḥusayn (see above) perhaps modifying Flügel's edition of Ibn al-Nadīm al-Fihrist where the name is al-Ḥasan ibn abī'l-Ḥusayn.<sup>12</sup> Dodge<sup>13</sup> and Sezgin,<sup>14</sup> having access to another manuscript tradition of al-Fihrist,<sup>15</sup> identify this person as al-Ḥasan (al-Baṣrī) ibn abī'l-Ḥasan. As Nöldeke noted, the handwriting of حسين / حسن is too easily confused to allow positive identification; Sezgin's zeal for identifying early authorities in tafsīr may well have led him to what can only be called a questionable judgment--several other instances of a similar procedure will be noted in this thesis.<sup>16</sup> No such manuscript has yet been located, so nothing definitive can really be said; the ambiguity of the title of Ibn al-Nadīm's section, Nuzūl al-Qur'ān must be noted, as for 'Ikrima above.

3. 'Alī ibn al-Madīnī (d. 234),<sup>17</sup> Kitāb al-tanzīl; a book by this title is found listed under Ibn al-Madīnī in Ibn al-Nadīm although it is not listed under the (perhaps) appropriate section Nuzūl al-Qur'ān but rather under Ibn al-Madīnī's name in the Ḥadīth section.<sup>18</sup> Once again, Ibn al-Nadīm leaves ambiguous the exact contents of this Kitāb al-tanzīl; is it a book of asbāb or something else? The connection of 'Alī ibn al-Madīnī with a work specifically on asbāb al-nuzūl appears to start in al-Zarkashī (d. 794),<sup>19</sup> is repeated by al-Suyūṭī (d. 911)<sup>20</sup> and then enters into Ḥajjī Khalīfa's Kashf al-Zunūn where quotations are lifted from al-Suyūṭī in extenso.<sup>21</sup> None of these works list a title for Ibn al-Madīnī's book. Whether these listings are guess-work derived from the title Kitāb al-tanzīl

in Al-Fihrist or derive from another source cannot be answered. No manuscript of the work has been located although 'Alī ibn al-Madīnī certainly does seem to be a historical personage; a ḥadīth scholar, he is credited with a long list of works, at least one of which is known and has recently been published and in which a brief account of his life and works may be found.<sup>22</sup>

It is also significant to note that despite the fact that al-Zarkashī and, more importantly, al-Suyūṭī list the book, neither makes use of such a text as a source.<sup>23</sup> As far as I have been able to determine, al-Wāḥidī does not use a text ascribed to Ibn al-Madīnī in his Kitāb asbāb al-nuzūl either; while the name is cited within isnāds a few times,<sup>24</sup> that fact is hardly firm evidence of literary dependency, given Ibn al-Madīnī's stature in ḥadīth and given the fact that al-Wāḥidī does, on occasion at least, give the literary sources of his information, especially for ḥadīth books.<sup>25</sup> The whole notion of Ibn al-Madīnī's authoring a book on asbāb al-nuzūl may well rest with al-Zarkashī, or at least with the scholarly tradition which he distills, which ultimately may have derived from Ibn al-Nadīm's ambiguous listing. There seems no particular reason to have faith in the existence of this book.

4. 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad Abū'l-Muṭarrif al-Andalusī (d. 402),<sup>26</sup> Al-qisṣa wa'l-asbāb allatī nazala min ajlihā al-Qur'ān; this work, whose author's existence is not acknowledged in GAL or GAS, is given the simple title Asbāb al-Nuzūl in Ḥājjī Khalīfa and Ahlwardt's catalogue<sup>27</sup> but the more descriptive title is given by al-Dāwudī (d. 945)<sup>28</sup> and perhaps from this source comes the description given by Aḥmad Ṣaqr.<sup>29</sup> According to both Ḥājjī Khalīfa and al-Dāwudī, the book was written in one hundred parts.

Most unfortunately, this book has not come down to us. I can see no particular reason for disbelieving in its existence, although the fact that neither al-Zarkashī nor al-Suyūṭī seem to know it may be deemed suspicious. A most significant aspect of the work however is its title and that for two reasons: first, the conjunction but separation of qisās and asbāb, which as will become clear was a bone of contention between al-Wāḥidī and al-Suyūṭī and second, the notion that the Qur'ān was revealed "on account of" or "because of"--min ajli--asbāb and qisās; clearly asbāb are not conceived of as "causes" or "reasons" themselves but rather perhaps as the "circumstances". Unfortunately (significant) implications drawn from such linguistic niceties rest on shaky pillars unless one sees the actual text of the work; it seems safer to note these points as significant, but leave it at that.

5. Ismā'īl ibn Aḥmad ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥirī al-Nisābūrī al-Ḍarīr (d. 430),<sup>30</sup> Asmā' man nazala fīhim al-Qur'ān. The work, mentioned in Ahlwardt's catalogue, seems to owe its record of existence to the bibliographical introduction to al-Suyūṭī's al-Itqān.<sup>31</sup> Al-Dāwudī lists only a tafsīr by this author as does Brockelmann.<sup>32</sup> The work apparently no longer exists; once again, the relevance of the work to asbāb al-nuzūl remains in the realm of speculation: it may relate to the (sub)-genre of ta'yīn al-mubham, identification of the unknown,<sup>33</sup> or may be quite similar to other asbāb books.

6. Abū'l-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī al-Nisābūrī (d. 468), [Kitāb] asbāb nuzūl al-Qur'ān. This work is called by al-Zarkashī and those following him "the most famous of its type".<sup>34</sup> The modern proliferation of prints of the text witnesses its continued popularity. The only



critical edition of the text is that prepared by Aḥmad Ṣaqr and printed in Cairo in 1969 by Dār al-Kitāb al-Jadīd.<sup>35</sup>

Al-Wāḥidī was a student of al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427)<sup>36</sup> a famous exegete who wrote a magisterial although still unpublished commentary, Al-Kashf wa'l-bayān ʿan tafsīr al-Qurʾān.<sup>37</sup> Al-Wāḥidī himself was a prolific writer of tafsīrs, authoring at least three;<sup>38</sup> his book on asbāb al-nuzūl, according to his own thinking, represents the distillation of the most essential elements of his tafsīr. In that book he lists asbāb for various verses contained in a total of eighty-three sūras of the Qurʾān, prefacing those reports by a brief introduction, speculation on the first and last pieces of the Qurʾān to be revealed and an account of the revelation of the basmala. A vast majority of the reports of the individual asbāb which al-Wāḥidī brings forth are in the form of ḥadīth reports, complete with full isnād, traced back to a companion of Muḥammad or another early authority. Occasionally the literary source of the report is mentioned--al-Bukhārī, Muslim and al-Ḥākim<sup>39</sup> are among the ḥadīth texts cited. Frequently too, one encounters a truncated isnād, the report simply being ascribed to Mujāhid, Muqātil, al-Kalbī or the like; as well, reports are found attributed simply to al-mufasssirūn.<sup>40</sup> At other times, absolutely no ascription is given as in the case of the brief report for sūra 105.

7. Muḥammad ibn Asʿad al-ʿIrāqī (d. 567),<sup>41</sup> Asbāb al-nuzūl wa qisās al-furqāniya; Chester Beatty manuscript 5199. Considerable confusion exists over this author and his work. There is a second copy of the manuscript in Berlin which I have not seen; the author's name on that manuscript is, apparently, Aḥmad ibn Asʿad al-ʿIrāqī and the title of the work

is Asbāb al-nuzūl bi'l-āyāt al-Qur'āniya wa qisṣa al-furgāniya.<sup>42</sup>

Ḥājjī Khalīfa gives the title simply as Asbāb al-nuzūl. But most confusing is a substantial variation in the date of the author: al-Dāwudī gives b. 484, d. 567. Flügel apparently has added this date of death into Ḥājjī Khalīfa in brackets. However Ahlwardt, followed by Brockelmann and Arberry, gives b. 580, d. 667;<sup>43</sup> the origin of the confusion has not yet been traced, nor has a satisfactory answer been found.

The text itself consists of a listing of asbāb al-nuzūl with the traditional material of qisṣa al-anbiyā' interspersed. The Chester Beatty manuscript is unfortunately broken in places and no total of sūras treated can be given. The reports are totally isnād -less and are quite clearly not simply taken from al-Wāḥidī but edited independently or, at least, are taken from another, unknown source.<sup>44</sup> Generally only one report is given for any given verse. The stories of the prophets occupy about half of the text and are elaborated at appropriate points although not systematically, that is, not necessarily at the first occurrence of the name of the prophet. The following table of contents of sūra 2 in the manuscript will make the outline clear:

<u>folio</u>	<u>contents</u>
1a	title page
1b	3 line introduction; <u>asbāb</u> for 2/6; 2/8; 2/14
2a	<u>sabab</u> for 2/14 continued; <u>qisṣa</u> of Adam at 2/35
2b	<u>asbāb</u> for 2/109; 2/114; 2/115; 2/154
3a	<u>asbāb</u> for 2/168; 2/187
3b	<u>asbāb</u> for 2/189a; 2/189b
4a	<u>asbāb</u> for 2/190; 2/204; 2/207

- 4b            asbāb for 2/208; 2/215; 2/217
- 5a            sabab for 2/217 continued
- 5b            sabab for 2/220
- 6a            asbāb for 2/221; 2/222; 2/224; 2/228; 2/229
- 6b            sabab for 2/230; qissa of kings of Israel at 2/243; qissa  
of David and Goliath at 2/246
- through 8b
- 8b            qissa of Nimrod at 2/258
- 9a            qissa of Ezra at 2/259
- 9b            qissa of Abraham at 2/260
- 10a           sabab for 2/278

Once again note must be taken of al-ʿIrāqī's separation of qissa and sabab especially since some of what al-ʿIrāqī includes under qissa al-Wāhidī has under (implicitly) sabab (e.g. ad 2/260).<sup>45</sup>

8.        Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Shuʿayb al-Māzandarānī (d. 588),<sup>46</sup> Kitāb asbāb al-nuzūl. This work finds mention in Ḥājjī Khalīfa, Kashf al-Zunūn and probably from there, in Ahlwardt's catalogue. Al-Dāwudī knows the author but not the work; Brockelmann knows not even the author.<sup>47</sup> No trace has been found of a copy of the work to the best of my knowledge; he was according to al-Dāwudī, a Shiʿite and thus would officially fall outside our realm of concern here even if the work existed.

9.        Abū'l-Faraj ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Jawzī al-Baghdādī (d. 597),<sup>48</sup> Kitāb asbāb al-nuzūl. Once again, this work is listed in Ḥājjī Khalīfa and Ahlwardt's catalogue,<sup>49</sup> but while the author is, of course, famous and prolific, this title does not seem to be extant or even well-known.

10.       Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm ibn ʿUmar al-Jaʿbarī (d. 732).<sup>50</sup> The situation concerning al-Jaʿbarī's authorship of a work on asbāb al-nuzūl

is complicated; two basic works are often listed for him:

(a) an abridgement of al-Wāḥidī, described by al-Suyūṭī and followed by Ḥājjī Khalīfa, as being simply al-Wāḥidī's text minus the isnāds and with nothing added. One problem is whether to accept this statement literally or view it as al-Suyūṭī's cryptic attack upon one of his predecessors, an attack such as he is so prone to make.<sup>51</sup> This text is thought to exist according to Brockelmann; under al-Wāḥidī,<sup>52</sup> rather than al-Jaʿbarī, he lists two manuscripts ascribed to al-Jaʿbarī and described as abridgements of al-Wāḥidī:

- i. A manuscript from Dār al-Kutub which I have not seen but Ahmad Ṣaqr describes it as "an abbreviated work, with no merit to it, due to its destructive tendencies in the process of abbreviation".<sup>53</sup>
- ii. Berlin 3578, described more extensively by Wagner in his recent catalogue.<sup>54</sup>

Now the Cairo manuscript remains an unknown factor in this discussion but even a quick glance at the Berlin manuscript raises grave doubts concerning the attribution of this manuscript at the very least and can only leave one amazed that Wagner did not question that ascription in writing his catalogue. An obviously different hand has given the work the following title: Mukhtaṣar asbāb al-nuzūl li'l-Wāḥidī al-Nisābūrī wa maʿa ziyādat al-nāsikh wa'l-mansūkh ilayhi li'l-shaykh Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm ibn ʿUmar al-Jaʿbarī al-Khalīlī tuwuffiya 732. The original first few folios of the manuscript are missing and the title page has quite evidently been added later. Additionally, the work does not conform to al-Suyūṭī's description of al-Jaʿbarī's work at all; elements have been added to the asbāb part of the work: for example, toward the

beginning of sūra 2, at verse 6, an extra sabab is added which is not found in al-Wāḥidī (likewise at verse 14);<sup>55</sup> that is only significant, in a sense, if one is prepared to overlook the more obvious discrepancy that an entire naskh work alternates with the asbāb text sūra by sūra throughout the text. Furthermore, not all the isnāds are missing, at least not in the sense that they are in al-ʿIrāqī's text; this work virtually always supplies the final authority for each report given. Finally, the manuscript was written, according to the last page, in the year 709,<sup>56</sup> that is, during al-Jaʿbarī's lifetime. It is, of course, not impossible that the manuscript was written during the lifetime of its supposed author but one is entitled to wonder, I think, why there seems to be no notation of the author's approval of the copy of the text or of some kind of laudatory exclamation concerning the author by the copyist (one Yūsuf ibn ʿAbd al-Qādir ibn Yūsuf al-Ḥanbalī al-Kūfī).

The fact that this work is almost certainly not that of al-Jaʿbarī certainly does not lessen its worth; if anything it probably increases it--given al-Suyūṭī's and Aḥmad Ṣaqr's description, al-Jaʿbarī's work would probably be similar to the anonymous Princeton manuscript described below which is void of any (except antiquarian<sup>57</sup>) interest. One suspects that this Berlin manuscript has been ascribed to al-Jaʿbarī merely because of the fame of that name due to its mention in al-Suyūṭī. A safer designation of the manuscript is simply "Berlin 3578" and that will be the practice followed in this thesis.

As described by Wagner, the manuscript covers the whole Qurʾān, treating each sūra in two parts: al-faṣl al-awwal fī musabbibihi and al-faṣl al-thānī fī mansūkhihi. In 27 sūras, the statement laysa fī (l-sūra) musabbib is made.

(b) Tagrīb al-ma'mūr fī tartīb al-nuzūl. This work, listed as an asbāb al-nuzūl work in Ahlwardt's catalogue<sup>58</sup> and in Blachère's Introduction au Coran,<sup>59</sup> brings an entirely new issue into the question of the definition of this genre of literature. Tagrīb al-ma'mūr, whose ascription to al-Ja'barī there is no particular reason to dispute, has been printed numerous times, at least once as a work by itself at the end of al-Dirīnī, al-Taysīr fī 'ilm al-Qur'ān<sup>60</sup> and, as well, as an integral part of al-Suyūṭī, al-Itqān.<sup>61</sup> The work is a poem of twenty-one lines, listing the sūras of the Qur'ān according to their chronological order. This text is not, in fact, a part of the asbāb al-nuzūl literature, but belongs to a separate, although perhaps not totally unrelated,<sup>62</sup> genre of lists of sūras; such lists exist in numerous places and, it should be noted, in at least four different versions.<sup>63</sup> Also falling into this genre, most likely, are two other works listed in Sezgin but the manuscripts of which I have been unable to consult:

- i. Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ayyūb ibn Yaḥyā ibn al-Durays al-Rāzī (d. 294),<sup>64</sup> Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān wa mā nazala min al-Qur'ān bi-Makka wa mā nazala bi'l-Madīna, Zāhiriya 3814, ff. 61-83, 88-121. This work would indeed seem to be quoted in al-Suyūṭī, al-Itqān, giving precisely a list of sūra order;<sup>65</sup> that the work is not substantially different from Abū 'Ubayd, Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān and thus irrelevant to asbāb al-nuzūl<sup>66</sup> is quite likely.
- ii. Abū'l-Qāsim al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Ḥabīb al-Nīsābūrī (d. 406),<sup>67</sup> Kitāb al-tanzīl wa tartībīhi, Zāhiriya 3763, ff. 221-232. The combination of tanzīl

and tartīb ("arrangement") and the short length of the text leads one to suspect that the work details sūra order rather than asbāb; no firm conclusion can be reached however from any of the skimpy published descriptions of the text.<sup>68</sup>

11. Hibat Allāh ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥīm ibn al-Bārīzī (d. 738),<sup>69</sup> Anwār al-taḥṣīl fī asrār al-tanzīl. Ahlwardt lists this work under the title Asrār al-tanzīl and considers it to be an asbāb work;<sup>70</sup> there seems, however, to be no particular justification for this description. The work appears not to exist today, but al-Suyūṭī lists the text in his bibliographical introduction to al-Itqān under the section iʿjāz/balāgha.<sup>71</sup>
12. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya (d. 751),<sup>72</sup> Rafʿ al-tanzīl. Once again, given in only Ahlwardt's list,<sup>73</sup> this work ascribed to Ibn Taymīya's famous pupil appears in no other listing consulted and appears not to exist today, thus its contents are not really ascertainable.
13. Abūʿl-ʿAbbās Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Naqīb al-Ḥanafī (d. 816),<sup>74</sup> Kitāb al-Muwāfaqāt allatī waqaʿat fīʿl-qurʿān al-ʿazīm li-amīr al-muʾminīn abī Ḥafs ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb al-ʿAdawī al-Qurashī. A manuscript of this work exists in Berlin although I have not seen it.<sup>75</sup> It is a short work of some eighteen folios and consists of a series of reports concerning twenty verses of the Qurʿān (e.g. Sūra 2/97)<sup>76</sup> which were revealed "concurring" with ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. The reports apparently have been culled from the Fajāʿil al-ṣaḥāba literature.<sup>77</sup> A similar text although shorter and in verse form by al-Suyūṭī is dealt with in greater detail below.<sup>78</sup>

14. Shihāb al-Dīn Ahmad ibn 'Alī ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 852),<sup>79</sup> Al-i'jāb fī [bi] bayān al-asbāb. This work by the prolific ḥadīth scholar is cited by al-Suyūṭī, Ḥājjī Khalīfa and Ahlwardt<sup>80</sup> although as al-Suyūṭī makes clear, it was never finished by its author and thus is not a work to be reckoned with. Why al-Suyūṭī even bothers to mention it is a reasonable question but one that cannot really be answered.

15. Jalāl al-Dīn Abū'l-Faḍl 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī (d. 911). The perhaps overly-prolific writer al-Suyūṭī penned at least two works connected with asbāb al-nuzūl.

(a) Lubāb al-Nuqūl fī asbāb al-nuzūl. This very popular work has been printed numerous times, although never in a "critical" edition. The most popular edition today is that found on the bottom of the Tafsīr al-Jalālayn although that print has omitted the introduction to the work and deleted the sign (a ٥) that al-Suyūṭī put in to denote where he had added new material as compared with al-Wāḥidī.<sup>81</sup> Al-Suyūṭī acknowledges his debt to al-Wāḥidī, although he criticizes the latter on a number of points; he then proceeds, in a sense, to re-edit al-Wāḥidī's book, making clear what the sources are of each report and omitting or adding reports as the case may be. The sources which al-Suyūṭī goes back to, other than al-Wāḥidī himself, are listed by him<sup>82</sup> as the following:

- i. "the six books", that is, the ḥadīth collections of al-Bukhārī, (d. 256)<sup>83</sup> Muslim (d. 261)<sup>84</sup> Abū Dāwūd (d. 275),<sup>85</sup> al-Tirmidhī (d. 279),<sup>86</sup> Ibn Māja (d. 273)<sup>87</sup> and al-Nasā'ī (d. 303)<sup>88</sup>
- ii. "al-Mustadrak" [of al-Ḥākim] (d. 404)<sup>89</sup>
- iii. "Ṣaḥīḥ of Ibn Ḥibban" (d. 354)<sup>90</sup>
- iv. "Sunan of al-Bayhaqī" (d. 458)<sup>91</sup>



- v. "Sunan of al-Dāraqutnī" (d. 385)<sup>92</sup>
  - vi. "Musnad of Aḥmad" [Ibn Ḥanbal] (d. 241)<sup>93</sup>
  - vii. "Musnad of al-Bazzār" (d. 292)<sup>94</sup>
  - viii. "Musnad of Abū Yaʿlā" (d. 307)<sup>95</sup>
  - ix. "Maʿājim of al-Ṭabarānī" (d. 360)<sup>96</sup>
  - x. "Tafsīr of Ibn Jarīr" [al-Ṭabarī] (d. 323)<sup>97</sup>
  - xi. "Tafsīr of Ibn Abī Ḥātim" (d. 327)<sup>98</sup>
  - xii. "Tafsīr of Ibn Mardawayh" (d. 410)<sup>99</sup>
  - xiii. "Tafsīr of Abū'l-Shaykh" (d. 369)<sup>100</sup>
  - xiv. "Tafsīr of Ibn Ḥibbān" (d. 354)<sup>101</sup>
  - xv. "Tafsīr of al-Firyābī" (d. 301)<sup>102</sup>
  - xvi. "Tafsīr of ʿAbd al-Razzāq" (d. 211)<sup>103</sup>
  - xvii. "Tafsīr of Ibn al-Mundhir" (d. 318)<sup>104</sup>
- and others.

Thus al-Suyūṭī's sources cover the realm of ḥadīth and tafsīr but, it is to be noted, no other asbāb book is cited. Al-Suyūṭī generally cites the reports from these sources, naming only the source (or sources) and the last authority of the isnād. In this way, a total of 102 sūras is covered in the work.

(b) Qaṭf al-thamar fī muwāfaqa Sayyidina ʿUmar. This work exists in at least two manuscripts, one consisting of just the eighteen-line poem itself (Berlin 3967) and the other in a 12 folio work consisting of the poem plus a commentary by a certain Muḥammad Badr al-Dīn al-Baysabānī, the title of the whole work being Fath al-wahhāb fī muwāfaqāt Sayyidina ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (Berlin Ahlwardt 469).<sup>105</sup> According to Wagner, the poem published as a part of al-Suyūṭī's work Al-Ḥawī li'l-fatāwī is identical. That poem runs as follows:



- 10 And a verse in al-Nūr "This is slander" [24/16]  
 And a verse in the matter of asking permission to enter [33/53]
- 11 And in the ending of al-Mu'minūn  
 "May God be blessed" for the preservation of the God-fearing  
 [23/14]
- 12 And "a group" of those who resemble the early converts [56/13]  
 And "similarity" in the verse of al-Munāfiqūn [63/6]
- 13 And they count from that the abrogated writing  
 of the verse which was revealed about the stoning [i.e. āyat al-rajm]
- 14 And his expression in the Torah  
 Called to his attention by Ka'b whereupon he fell prostrate
- 15 And in the matter of the call to prayer, mention of the prophet [48/29]  
 I saw him in a report received,
- 16 And in the Qur'ān is set forth the verification  
 of that which is in agreement with al-Ṣiddīq. [Abū Bakr]
- 17 As for example in his saying "he who prayed  
 over you, how great is he in virtue" [33/43]
- 18 And in his saying at the end of al-Mujādala  
 "You will not find," the verse about relatives [58/22]
- 19 I have arranged what I have found transmitted of it  
 And praise be to God for what is most worthy.<sup>106</sup>

. . . . .

As can be seen, the text deals with a very specialized part of asbāb al-nuzūl, those verses revealed about a common object or person, in this case, ʿUmar.

Two other works are listed in Brockelmann, ascribed to al-Suyūṭī: Risāla fī nuzūl al-Qur'ān 'alā sab'a aḥruf (India Office 1217) and Su'āl kayfiyat al-nuzūl (Paris 4088, 40) and are listed there as though they were similar to Lubāb al-nuqūl.<sup>107</sup> The titles of both of these works however indicate that their content matter is more likely to be information taken from or expanded from his al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān and peripheral at best to actual texts of asbāb al-nuzūl.

16. Muḥammad ibn Tāj al-ʿArifīn<sup>108</sup> wrote an apparently untitled poem in the year 1094, a manuscript of which is found in Berlin (Ahlwardt 471). The work would seem to be primarily a versification of al-Wāḥidī's text (although note that Ibn Daqīq al-ʿId<sup>109</sup> is mentioned also in the introduction to the poem); in fact, the brief pieces quoted in Ahlwardt's catalogue indicate that the work follows al-Wāḥidī's work closely and is probably of little independent value.

17. ʿAṭīya al-Ujhūrī (d. 1190),<sup>110</sup> Irshād al-Raḥmān li-asbāb al-nuzūl wa'l-naskh wa'l-mutashābih wa-tajwīd al-Qur'ān; this title is given by Brockelmann in reference to four manuscripts although Ahlwardt just gives the title Asbāb al-Nuzūl in his summary of the genre.<sup>111</sup> I have not been able to consult this work.

18. An unknown abridgement of al-Wāḥidī exists in the Princeton Garrett Collection 135 (Yahuda 5143).<sup>112</sup> The work has been given the title, by a hand different from the original scribe [Kitāb] asbāb nuzūl al-āya [sic] wa'l-suwar; the first part of the manuscript, called in the text Kitāb asbāb nuzūl al-āyāt consists of a work much like that which would seem to be described by al-Suyūṭī and ascribed to al-Jaʿbarī: limited totally to reports given by al-Wāḥidī and minus the isnāds (with the exception of the

final authority). On folio 63b a second book begins, with the simple title Kitāb asbāb al-nuzūl and consists of selected extracts quoted directly from al-Suyūṭī's al-Itcān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān. It is certain, therefore, that the work must have been written after al-Suyūṭī, and thus cannot be the work that al-Ja'barī is thought to have written, and is, therefore, of little independent value except antiquarian.

19. The Berlin catalogue also lists an unknown work, Tafsīl li-asbāb al-nuzūl (Ahlwardt 470).<sup>113</sup> The work consists of only 8 folios and is incomplete. The manuscript was written around the year 900.

We thus arrive at a position of having four basic, important texts available and central to a study of asbāb al-nuzūl: al-Wāḥidī; al-'Irāqī; Berlin 3578; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb al-Nuqūl.

A more precise outline of the nature of these books is now required. How the authors conceive their task in writing these books is perhaps the most valuable insight into the nature of the genre as a whole. Only al-Wāḥidī and al-Suyūṭī provide us with any measure of self-conscious analysis of how they went about writing their books: al-'Irāqī has no introduction; an introduction to Berlin 3578 is not extant if it was ever written.

To a concern over exactly what it is that he is gathering in his book, al-Wāḥidī gives a vague answer; asserting that the sabab is crucial in tafsīr, a point to be dealt with fully in Chapter II below, he goes on to assert that one is entitled to say nothing about asbāb nuzūl al-kitāb unless one has written or oral reports (bi'l-riwāya wa'l-samā') from someone who witnessed the revelation, was acquainted with the

asbāb, studied the science of the asbāb and was serious about its study.<sup>114</sup> The hadīth status of his reports seems to be the major criterion of al-Wāḥidī's book, but exactly what these reports should transmit is left open; the term asbāb is not defined and, given the fact that the reporter is supposed to have "witnessed the revelation", it may refer to the historical "circumstances" (i.e., time, place) or the actual "cause", (i.e. what provoked the revelation), or merely be related, i.e., a ruling contained within a verse is seen to apply in legal substance in the specified historical circumstance (of the report), although the two (revelation and sabab) are different historical moments.

Indeed al-Wāḥidī's vagueness seems to have provided al-Suyūṭī with his motivation to write his own book. Al-Suyūṭī complains that al-Wāḥidī did not live up to his own hadīth requirements--al-Wāḥidī does not rate the isnāds; several times he leaves the isnād out; and as a result it becomes ambiguous what is being referred to.<sup>115</sup> But another reason according to al-Suyūṭī is that al-Wāḥidī has included what was not properly from asbāb: he has included several things that are more properly akhbār. Al-Suyūṭī cites the example of al-Wāḥidī's report on Sūrat al-fīl: "It was revealed about (nazalat fī) the story (qissa) of the Companions of the Elephant and their expedition to destroy the Ka'ba and what God did to them, fighting them off and turning them away from the House (in Mecca). (The story) is well known."<sup>116</sup> Al-Zarkashī, as quoted by al-Suyūṭī,<sup>117</sup> proposes criteria in order to distinguish and understand such examples, criteria which, however, al-Suyūṭī would seem to reject: that it is possible that some reports which are included as asbāb actually mean no more than that the verse applies to this situation (in a legal context) rather than that the situation was the

cause of its revelation. What is significant is al-Zarkashī's way of phrasing this: **إذا قال : نزلت هذه الآية في كذا فإنه يريد بذلك أن هذه الآية** <sup>118</sup> Al-Zarkashī implies that the confusion arises between "cause" and "application" because the phrase nazalat hādhihi 'l-āya fī kādhā can imply either thing;<sup>119</sup> thus, it is implied, it is this phrase "nazalat fī" that is the overriding criterion of what has been considered a sabab al-nuzūl, although according to al-Zarkashī this is not sufficient. It is worthy of note that al-Zarkashī gives no details of how he proposes to separate "cause" and "application"; this is a hermeneutical device, designed specifically so that he may draw the distinction where and when necessary.

Further light may be shed on this point by paying attention to the actual term sabab and its rise to technical status. An obvious place to look for the meaning of the term and the context of its rise to technical status may be the Qur'ān; other technical terms of exegesis find their place of origin in that book: ta'wīl, mutashābih, muhkam, naskh are all terms whose use in a technical sense may (perhaps) be derived in the first place from their Quranic usage.<sup>120</sup>

The root SBB is used a total of eleven times in the Qur'ān; twice the verb is used in Q. 6/108 where clearly the meaning is "to curse"

Do not curse (lā tasubbū) those who call on  
other than God, or they will curse (yasubbū)  
God in revenge without knowledge.

The nine other instances of the use of the root--five times as a singular noun sabab, four times as a plural asbāb--are divided by some classical exegetes<sup>121</sup> into four different meaning groups:

(a) sabab = gates/doors (abwāb)

Q. 38/10 Do they have the kingdom of the heavens and the earth and what is between them? Let them mount fī'l-asbāb!

Q. 40/36-37 Pharaoh said: "Oh Hāmān! Build me a tower so that I may reach al-asbāb! Al-asbāb of the heavens so I may look upon the God of Moses - for I think he is a liar!"

These three instances have produced a wide variety of interpretation in modern translations of the Qur'ān--rope, cords, ways and means--as opposed to the "classical" explanation that the asbāb here are the gates of heaven,<sup>122</sup> in keeping with the common Quranic (and Biblical) imagery of the entrance-way to heaven.<sup>123</sup> Both the unbelievers in 38/10 and Pharaoh in 40/36-37 are tempted with the vision, the latter of course only to be frustrated, the former given the possibility only in an ironic sense.

(b) sabab = stations, places, supports (manāzil)

Q. 2/166 When those who were followed disown their followers--they would see the punishment and al-asbāb are cut off from them.

Q. 18/89 He [Dhū'l-Qarnayn] followed a sabab.

The interpretation of the first verse is connected with events in the hereafter concerning the unbelievers; those who have strayed from God's way will assemble on platforms, manāzil, asbāb, according to their degree of rebellion but their support/platform will be withdrawn from them.

Q. 18/89 is explained by Muqātil as meaning that he followed the stations (manāzil, asbāb) of the earth and its path (ṭuruq). Such an interpretation is ambiguous, lending itself to full mystical interpretation. The entire passage is indeed often taken in a mystical way.

(c) sabab = knowledge (ʿilm)

Q. 18/84 We established him [Dhū'l-Qarnayn] in the land and we gave him a sabab from/of [min] all things.



Q. 18/85      So he followed a sabab.

To separate these verses about Dhū'l-Qarnayn from the entire exegesis concerned with the passage renders their interpretation extremely difficult. However, sabab in verse 84 is taken to mean knowledge simply and in verse 85 as knowledge of the manāzil according to the explanation of Muqātil. The precise relationship between this latter verse and verse 89, treated above, is not clear (nor in fact do the texts make clear which passage is being referred to; the Arabic phrase is the same in both cases).

(d)      sabab = rope (ḥabl)

Q. 22/15      Whoever thinks God will not help him [Muḥammad?] in the world now and in the hereafter, let him [the accuser ?] stretch a sabab to al-samā' and then let him cut (it); then let him see if his plan removes that which annoys him [i.e., gets rid of Muḥammad?]

A problematic verse for exegetes indeed, especially as to whether this is a reference to a specific event and specific people or is a general statement. Al-samā', normally "the heavens", is often understood and translated here as "the ceiling"; "let him cut (it)" is variously explained as "cutting off his support or rope" or, as in Lane, "let him die strangled" or even "let him traverse (the heavens)".<sup>124</sup> All interpretations, however, seem to see sabab as the means by which to reach up, and this means is made specific by defining the word as "rope".

Now, quite obviously, there is no easy peg in any of these verses in which the term sabab/asbāb is used that would allow an easy derivation from the Qur'ān of the technical sense of sabab as connected with the process of revelation. None of the verses seem the least bit related to a statement concerning revelatory procedure.<sup>125</sup>

A study of exegetical use of the term sabab indicates a late rise in the use of the term. While it would not be unreasonable to expect to find phrases such as "and the sabab of that verse being revealed was" or "that was the sabab of that verse" in early exegetical works, in fact such phrases seem not to be found either in early exegetical works--e.g., those of Muqātil (d. 150),<sup>126</sup> Mujāhid (d. 104)<sup>127</sup> or Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161)<sup>128</sup> nor in early sīra works by Ibn Ishāq (d. 151)<sup>129</sup> or al-Wāqidī (d. 167)<sup>130</sup> or in the Kitāb al-Tafsīr of the major ḥadīth collections by al-Bukhārī (d. 256)<sup>131</sup> and Muslim (d. 261).<sup>132</sup> The term begins to make its appearance in the tafsīr of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310)<sup>133</sup> and in the naskh text of al-Naḥḥās (d. 338);<sup>134</sup> in both these cases, however, the technical usage is primitive--al-Naḥḥās on 2/104 is more interested in the pun between sabb as curse and sabab although in 2/219 the usage is more "technical".<sup>135</sup> Al-Ṭabarī uses the word fairly frequently but usually in the sense of the "cause" of God writing in the celestial tablet rather than the "cause" of the verse being revealed into its historical circumstances.<sup>136</sup> It is only with al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370)<sup>137</sup> that the term is used with regularity in order to introduce reports about the revelation of the Qur'ān; the legal context in which the term seems to have gained technical status may well be thought to be a significant fact in the application of the material itself.

Thus, in a sense, it is not surprising that al-Wāḥidī's work is the earliest extant work gathering together such reports into one book; it was perhaps only a century earlier that the term became fixed and thus that the existence of a distinct type of exegetical information was marked out. Indeed al-Wāḥidī's statement that the asbāb are the key to all exegesis could perhaps be interpreted in such light.

Al-Wāḥidī does, however, give an additional reason for gathering together all these reports and it is a statement which sheds light on the entire nature of his undertaking.

Today, everyone invents something and fabricates fibs and lies, throwing his age into ignorance, not paying attention to the threat resulting from ignorance of the sabab of the revelation of the verse. That was what induced me to gather this book putting together the asbāb in order to reach those who desire to know these things, and those who discuss the revelation of the Qur'ān, they will know the truth.<sup>138</sup>

Overlooking al-Wāḥidī's polemic against the ignorance of his age, a few significant points need to have attention drawn to them: one, al-Wāḥidī mentions no previous, genuine book of the type and, given the context of the statement, he could well have. Second, although he says "everyone" kull aḥad, invents, one is entitled to speculate whether or not he perhaps has someone or some group in mind specifically.

The possibility that sectarian debates play their role in this matter must not be overlooked, especially given the existence of one further asbāb al-nuzūl book but one by a Shi'ite writer: 'Ubayd Allāh ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad al-Ḥākim al-Ḥaskānī who died in the year 470<sup>139</sup> and who wrote a book called Shawāhid al-tanzīl li-qawā'id al-tafdīl fi'l-āyāt al-nāzila fī ahl al-bayt. This work, as the title explains, is concerned with verses revealed in connection with 'Alī and his family and is, quite apparently, arguing for the supremacy of 'Alī in all matters. The possibility that this kind of work is the type of "invention" cited by al-Wāḥidī cannot be ignored; nor is it surprising that in later centuries people should write works specifically devoted to 'Umar, as perhaps a counter-measure to such works on 'Alī. Finally, the title of al-Ḥaskānī's

work should be noted; it is not called Asbāb al-Nuzūl nor indeed is the term asbāb found within the text itself. While sectarian use of the term may explain this fact, it may, too, have been the influence of al-Wāḥidī which established the name of the genre.<sup>140</sup>

## Notes to Chapter I.

1. Ḥājjī Khalīfa, Kashf al-Zunūn, p. 267.
2. Ḥājjī Khalīfa, Muṣṭafa ibn ʿAbd Allāh Kātib ʿalebī, b. 1017, d. 1067; see GAL II 427, S II 635; EI<sup>2</sup> IV 760-762.
3. P. 305.
4. Abū'l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad al-Wāhidī al-Nīsābūrī; date of birth unknown, d. 468; see GAL I 411, S I 730. Also see below, pp. 12-13 (Chapter I), 89 (Chapter III).
5. GdQ II 182-184. Nöldeke/Schwally's concern over the actual sources of al-Wāhidī's text is not shared by the present writer; al-Suyūṭī's introduction to his work (see below p. 20) makes clear his own sources and is as significant a statement as one could wish.
6. P. 234, note 334; see below p. 18 for further details. A similarly limited statement is found in W. M. Watt, Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān, p. 167. Also see Blachère's treatment of the significance of the sabab, Introduction pp. 240-247, a primarily intuitive treatment (i.e., not based on careful consideration of the material but by what appeared to be the logic of the situation) not surpassed until John Wansbrough's Quranic Studies. These matters will be raised in further detail in Chapter III A below.
7. ʿIkrima (mawlā ibn ʿAbbās), see GAS I 23, 24, 26, 81, 91, 243, 285 for brief details; EI<sup>2</sup> III 1081-1082; Goldziher, Richtungen, pp. 75-76.
8. ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās, b. three years before the Hijra, d. 68, 69 or 70; see GAS I 25-28; EI<sup>2</sup> I 40-41.
9. Ibn al-Nadīm, al-Fihrist, p. 38; translation I 82. Muḥammad ibn Ishāq ibn al-Nadīm, wrote al-Fihrist in 377 and died (perhaps) in 380; see GAS I 385-388; EI<sup>2</sup> III 895-896.
10. On Ibn ʿAbbās and his role in exegetical literature, see A. Rippin, "Ibn ʿAbbās's al-Lughāt fī'l-Qur'ān", BSOAS XLIV (1981); also "The Exegetical Works Ascribed to Ibn ʿAbbās: An Examination", Abstracts, American Academy of Religion, 1979, pp. 148-149. Also see QS Chapter IV passim. For more traditional interpretations of Ibn ʿAbbās' role see GAS I 25-28; N. Abbott, SALP II, esp. pp. 106-113; also Goldziher, Richtungen, pp. 65-81.
11. Al-Ḥasan ibn Abī'l-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, b. 21, d. 110; see GAS I 30, 591-594; EI<sup>2</sup> III 247-248.

12. P. 38.
13. Translation of Ibn al-Nadīm, al-Fihrist I 82.
14. GAS I 30, 592.
15. Specifically Chester Beatty 3315 and Shadīd 'Alī Pasha 1934; see introduction to al-Fihrist translation I xxiii-xxx and GAS I 388.
16. See below pp. 83-88 on the tafsīr of Ibn 'Abbās.
17. 'Alī ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Ja'far al-Madīnī, b. 161, d. 234 although Ibn al-Nadīm, al-Fihrist, p. 231, translation I 556 gives 258 as the death date. Also note that Hājji Khalīfa, Kashf al-Zunūn, followed by W. Ahlwardt, Die Handschriften-Verzeichnisse der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin I 185 gives his name as 'Alī ibn al-Madanī. See on him GAS I 108. It should be noted that Ahlwardt provides in his catalogue of Berlin manuscripts, I 185, a list of titles of works to which he had discovered reference connected to the topic of asbāb al-nuzūl; further references will be made to this list below.
18. Al-Fihrist, p. 231; translation I 556; Dodge gives the title as Kitāb al-tanzīl al-latīf, "The Gracious Revelation". Ahlwardt, Handschriften-Verzeichnisse I 185, gives the title as Asbāb al-Nuzūl but this is probably just given in lieu of anything else; see below.
19. Al-Zarkashī, al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān I 22. Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Zarkashī, b. 745, d. 794; see GAL II 91, S II 108.
20. Al-Suyūṭī, al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān I 82. 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr ibn Muḥammad Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, b. 849, d. 911; See GAL II 143, S II 178, EI<sup>1</sup> IV 573-575. The relationship between these works of al-Zarkashī and al-Suyūṭī will come up for comment on several occasions below and has been the subject of an exhaustive study by K. E. Nolin, "The Itqān and its Sources: A Study of Al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī with special reference to Al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān by Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī", Ph.D. Thesis, Hartford Seminary, 1968.
21. Kashf al-Zunūn, p. 268; see also Aḥmad Ṣaqr, introduction to al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb Nuzūl al-Qur'ān, p. 23.
22. Al-'ilal ['ilal al-ḥadīth wa ma'rifat al-rijāl according to GAS I 108], pp. 3-34.
23. See below pp. 20-21 on al-Suyūṭī's list of sources.

24. E.g., at Q. 21/101.
25. E.g., al-Bukhārī at Q. 2/143; Muslim at Q. 2/143; al-Hākim at Q. 12/3. On these books see further below, p.13.
26. Abū'l-Muṭarrif's date of death is given as 335 in Ahlwardt, Handschriften-Verzeichnisse I 185. His date of birth is apparently unknown. Al-Dāwudī, Tabaqāt al-Mufasssīrīn I 285-287 gives a list of his teachers, students and works.
27. Kashf al-Zunūn, p. 268; Handschriften-Verzeichnisse I 185.
28. Tabaqāt al-Mufasssīrīn I 285-287. Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn Ahmad al-Dāwudī, date of birth unknown, died 945; see GAL II 289, S II 401.
29. Introduction to al-Wāhidī, Asbāb Nuzūl al-Qur'ān, p. 23.
30. Al-Hīrī, b. 361, d. 430; see GAL S I 729. Also of interest is M. Abdus Sattar, "Al-Hīrī's Kifāyat al-tafsīr: A rare manuscript on exegesis of the Qur'ān", Islamic Studies 16 (1977) 117-130.
31. I 8 line 13 [Ḥalabī edition].
32. Al-Dāwudī, Tabaqāt al-Mufasssīrīn I 104-105; GAL S I 729.
33. See QS 135-136 and Chapter II below, p. 33.
34. Al-Zarkashī, al-Burhān I 22; al-Suyūṭī, al-Itqān I 82; Ḥajjī Khalīfa, Kashf al-Zunūn, p. 268.
35. See the basic description of the text given in Ahlwardt, Handschriften-Verzeichnisse I 180-181 (MSS 463, 464).
36. Abū Ishāq Ahmad ibn Muḥammad al-Tha'labī al-Nīsābūrī, date of birth unknown, d. 427; see GAL I 350-351, S I 592.
37. See e.g., British Library Add. 19926 (Vol. I), OR 9060 (Vol. III). It is worthy of note that al-Tha'labī provides at the beginning of Vol. I of his tafsīr a bibliography of sources employed and/or known to him, a list which Sezgin has used in GAS extensively; no asbāb al-nuzūl text is given in this list.
38. On these see below Chapter III p. 89.
39. Al-Wāhidī, Asbāb Nuzūl al-Qur'ān, e.g., ad 2/143 (al-Bukhārī and Muslim) 12/3 (al-Hākim). Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī al-Ju'fī, b. 194, d. 256; see GAS I 115-134; GAL I 157-160, SI 260-265; EI<sup>2</sup> I 1296-1297. Abū'l-Ḥasayn Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī al-Nīsābūrī, b. 202, d. 261; see GAS I 136-143; GAL I 160-171, SI 265-266; EI<sup>1</sup> III 756. Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamdawayh al-Hākim al-Nīsābūrī, b. 321, d. 404; see GAS I 221-222; GAL I 166, SI 276; EI<sup>2</sup> III 82.

40. Many examples of such reports will be noted below in Chapter III. Abū'l-Ḥajjāj Mujaḥhid ibn Jabr al-Makkī, b. 21, d. 104; see GAS I 29. Abū'l-Ḥasan Muqātil ibn Sulaymān ibn Bashīr al-Balkhī, date of birth unknown, d. 150; see GAS I 36-37; Abbott, SALP II 92-106. Muḥammad ibn al-Sā'ib al-Kalbī, b. 66, d. 146; see GAS I 34-35, but cf. below Chapter III pp. 86-88.
41. Al-'Irāqī, b. 484, d. 567 but cf. below at note 43; see GAL I 415.
42. Ahlwardt, Handschriften-Verzeichnisse I 182, MS 465.
43. Al-Dāwudī, Tabaqāt al-Mufasssīrīn II 87-89; Ḥājjī Khalīfa, Kashf al-Zunūn, p. 268; Ahlwardt, Handschriften-Verzeichnisse I 182; GAL I 415; Arberry, A Handlist of the Arabic Manuscripts in the Chester Beatty Library VII 64.
44. Instances of this relationship will be explored further in Chapter III below.
45. See further below, pp. 410-414 ; note that the gaps in the treatment of sūra 2 in the MS of al-'Irāqī seem intentional (e.g., between verse 39 and 109); there is no evidence of loss of text.
46. Al-Māzandarānī, date of birth unknown, d. 588; see al-Dāwudī, Tabaqāt al-Mufasssīrīn II 199-200.
47. Ḥājjī Khalīfa, Kashf al-Zunūn, p. 269; Ahlwardt, Handschriften-Verzeichnisse I 185; al-Dāwudī, Tabaqāt al-Mufasssīrīn II 199-200.
48. Ibn al-Jawzī, b. 508, d. 597; see GAL I 500-506, S I 914-920; EI<sup>2</sup> III 751-752.
49. Ḥājjī Khalīfa, Kashf al-Zunūn, p. 268; Ahlwardt, Handschriften-Verzeichnisse I 185.
50. Al-Ja'barī, b. 640, d. 732; see GAL II 109, S II 134-135.
51. See below p. 26.
52. GAL S I 730.
53. Dār al-Kutub manuscript catalogue, Fihrist al-Kutub 2nd ed., I 61; see Introduction to al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb Nuzūl al-Qur'ān, p. 28.
54. E. Wagner, Arabische Handschriften I 8-9.
55. Further examples will be detailed below in Chapter III.
56. See folio 116b; Wagner, Arabische Handschriften I 8.



57. See below pp. 24-25.
58. Handschriften-Verzeichnisse I 185.
59. P. 234, note 334.
60. Pp. 162-163. Al-Dirīnī himself apparently wrote a similar work, see Ahlwardt, Handschriften-Verzeichnisse I 182, MS 466. 'Izz al-Dīn 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dirīnī, b. 612, d. 697; see GAL I 451, S I 810-811.
61. I 25-26 [Ḥalabī edition].
62. See QS 177-180.
63. See QS 180; GdQ I 59-62; Blachère, Introduction au Coran p. 245; al-Suyūṭī, al-Itqān I 8-12 [Ḥalabī edition]; al-Zarkashī, al-Burhān I 184-194; Ibn al-Nadīm, Fihrist, pp. 25-26, trans. I 49-53; Abū 'Ubayd, Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān, ff. 51a-52b (Berlin MS 451); al-Zuhri, Kitāb al-Tanzīl, pp. 23-32.
64. Ibn al-Ḍurays, b. 200, d. 294; see GAS I 42; 'Izza Ḥasan, Fihris mukhtūṭāt Dār al-Kutub al-Zāhiriya: 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān, pp. 422-423. Nolin, "The Itqān and its Sources" has vowelised the name as Ibn al-Ḍarrīs, Blachère, Introduction au Coran, Ibn al-Ḍirrīs.
65. I 10-11 [Ḥalabī edition].
66. See Berlin MS 451, Ahlwardt, Handschriften-Verzeichnisse I 175-177 for full outline of contents; also see Anton Spitaler, "Ein Kapitel aus den Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān von Abū 'Uбайд al-Qāsim ibn Sallām" in J. W. Fück (ed.), Documenta Islamica Inedita, pp. 1-24.
67. Ibn Ḥabīb al-Nisābūrī, date of birth unknown, d. 406; see GAS I 47.
68. See 'Izza Ḥasan, Fihris, p. 419.
69. Ibn al-Bārizī, b. 645, d. 738; see GAL II 86, S II 101.
70. Handschriften-Verzeichnisse I 185.
71. I 8 line 2 [Ḥalabī edition].
72. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, b. 691, d. 751; see GAL II 105-106, S II 126-128; EI<sup>2</sup> II 821-822.
73. Handschriften-Verzeichnisse I 185.
74. Ibn al-Naqīb, b. 771, d. 816; see GAL II 112, S II 138.

75. MS 468; see Ahlwardt, Handschriften-Verzeichnisse I 182-183.
76. See below Chapter III, pp. 149-153.
77. See the partial distillation of such in, for example, al-Tibrīzī, Mishkāṭ al-Maṣābiḥ, translation vol. IV.
78. See pp. 21-23.
79. Ibn Ḥajar, b. 773, d. 852; see GAL II 67-70, S II 72-76; EI<sup>2</sup> III 776-778.
80. Al-Suyūṭī, al-Itqān, I 82; Ḥājjī Khalīfa, Kashf al-Zunūn, p. 268-269; Ahlwardt, Handschriften-Verzeichnisse I 185; also see introduction to al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb Nuzūl al-Qur'ān, p. 23.
81. Reference in this thesis is to the edition of Lubāb al-Nuqūl done in 5 fascicules, Cairo 1382, which includes the introduction.
82. P. 7.
83. Al-Bukhārī, al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ.
84. Muslim, Al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ.
85. Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān ibn al-Ash'ath, b. 202, d. 275; see GAS I 149-152; EI<sup>2</sup> I 114; Kitāb al-Sunan.
86. Abū 'Isā Muḥammad ibn 'Isā al-Tirmidhī, b. 210, d. 279; see GAS I 154-159; EI<sup>1</sup> IV 796-797; Al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ.
87. Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Yazīd ibn Māja, b. 209, d. 273; see GAS I 147-148; EI<sup>2</sup> III 856; al-Sunan.
88. Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Aḥmad ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Nasā'ī, b. 215, d. 303; see GAS I 167-179; SEI pp. 439-440; Kitāb al-Sunan.
89. Al-Mustadrak 'alā'l-Ṣaḥīḥayn.
90. Abū Ḥātim Muḥammad ibn Ḥibbān al-Bustī, b. 270, d. 354; see GAS I 189-191; EI<sup>2</sup> 799; Al-Musnad al-Ṣaḥīḥ 'alā'l-taqsīm wa'l-anwā'. Some editions of Lubāb al-Nuqūl have Ibn Ḥayyān; cf. below note 101.
91. Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥasayn al-Bayhaqī, b. 384, d. 458; see GAL I 363, S I 618-619; EI<sup>2</sup> I 1130; Kitāb al-Sunan al-āthār [al-Kabīr].
92. Abū'l-Ḥasan 'Alī bin 'Uthmān al-Daraqutnī, b. 305/6, d. 385; see GAS I 206-209; EI<sup>2</sup> II 136; Kitāb al-Sunan.

93. Abū 'Abd Allāh Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥanbal, b. 164, d. 241; see GAS I 502-509; EI<sup>2</sup> I 272-277; Al-Musnad.
94. Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn 'Amr ibn 'Abd al-Khālīq al-Bazzār, date of birth unknown, d. 292; see GAS I, 162; Al-Musnad. Nolin, "The Itqān and its Sources", p. 131, has al-Bazār; some editions of Lubāb al-Nuqūl have al-Bazzāz.
95. Abū Ya'lā Aḥmad ibn 'Alī al-Tamīmī al-Mawṣilī, b. 210, d. 307; see GAS I 170-171; Al-Musnad.
96. Abū'l-Qāsim Sulaymān ibn Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī, b. 260, d. 360; see GAS I 195-197; Al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr; Al-Mu'jam al-Awsaṭ; Al-Mu'jam al-Saghīr.
97. Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, b. 224/5, d. 310; see GAS I 323-328; EI<sup>1</sup> IV 578-579; Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl al-Qur'ān.
98. Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, b. 240, d. 327; see GAS I 178-179; Al-Tafsīr.
99. Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn Mūsā ibn Mardawayh al-Iṣfahānī, b. 323, d. 410; see GAS I 225; al-Tafsīr (not extant).
100. Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad ibn Ja'far ibn Ḥayyān Abū'l-Shaykh, b. 274, d. 369; see GAS I 200-201; according to Sezgin, Ibn Ḥajar knew of a tafsīr by this author but it is not extant; cf. below note 101.
101. Al-Tafsīr, extant in part, GAS I 191; Nolin, "The Itqān and its Sources", p. 141, considers Abū'l-Shaykh (Above note 100) and Ibn Ḥibbān to be the same person and the "wa" between their names in al-Itqān to be a mistake; he bases this on one manuscript. However, prints of Lubāb al-Nuqūl are uniform in separating the two. The mistake may actually have crept into Nolin's manuscript since Abū'l-Shaykh is Ibn Ḥayyān.
102. Two likely possibilities exist here: Abū Bakr Ja'far ibn Muḥammad al-Firyābī, b. 207, d. 301; see GAS I 166; no tafsīr is listed for this author although a Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān text is extant; less likely is Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Firyābī, b. 120, d. 212; see GAS I 40; his tafsīr is cited by al-Ṭabarī and al-Tha'labī.
103. Abū Bakr 'Abd al-Razzāq ibn Hammām al-Ḥimyārī, b. 126, d. 211; see GAS I 99; Al-Tafsīr but cf. below Chapter III p. 85.
104. Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mundhir al-Nīsābūrī, date of birth unknown, d. 318; see GAS I 495-496; Tafsīr al-Qur'ān.

105. See Ahlwardt, Handschriften-Verzeichnisse I 183.
106. Al-Suyūṭī, Al-Hawī li'l-fatāwī I 377-378; also see Wagner, Arabische Handschriften I 9-10. On the mention of Ka'b in line 14, see QS 75. I am indebted to Dr. Wansbrough for substantial assistance with this poem.
107. See GAL S II 179 items 3a, 3b.
108. Al-ʿArifīn is apparently not identifiable any further; see GAL II 327 and cf. S II 694, 978; also see Ahlwardt, Handschriften-Verzeichnisse I 184.
109. Taqī al-Dīn Abū'l-Faṭḥ Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Daqīq al-ʿId al-Manfalūṭī, b. 625, d. 702; see GAL II 63, S II 66.
110. Al-Ujhūrī, date of birth unknown, d. 1190; see GAL II 328, 329, S II 456.
111. Ahlwardt, Handschriften-Verzeichnisse I 185; the manuscripts listed in GAL are "Kairo I, 122, 231; Selim Aga 35; Kairo<sup>2</sup> I, 31."
112. See Mach, Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts (Yahuda Section), p. 14.
113. Ahlwardt, Handschriften-Verzeichnisse I 183-184.
114. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb Nuzūl al-Qur'ān, p. 5; also see QS 179.
115. See below Chapter III for various examples although cf. Aḥmad Ṣaqr's introduction to al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb Nuzūl al-Qur'ān, pp. 28-29.
116. See al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb Nuzūl al-Qur'ān, p. 500; also see EI<sup>2</sup> II 895.
117. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb al-Nuqūl, p. 6; see al-Zarkashī, al-Burhān I 31-32.
118. Al-Zarkashī, al-Burhān I 31-32.
119. See also Ibn Taymīya, Muqaddima, p. 48; also al-Suyūṭī, al-Itqān I 90.
120. See QS Chapter IV for consideration of these and other examples.
121. The primary work here is Muqātil, Al-ashbāh wa'l-nazā'ir fī'l-Qur'ān al-Karīm; this work is virtually copied totally by al-Dāmaghānī (d. 478; see GAL I 373) Iṣlāḥ al-wujūh wa'l-nazā'ir fī'l-Qur'ān al-Karīm and the analysis has, in a sense, become standard within the genre of wujūh literature. A methodological note may be appropriate here. The thought may occur that it would be more appropriate to try to ascertain the so-called "original meaning" of sabab/asbāb in the following Qur'ān passages in order to determine if the technical term is derived from the

Qur'ān. This, it may be thought, is especially necessary because the classical wujūh literature here employed is (quite obviously) imposing "later" ideas on the Qur'ān, e.g., fully developed notions of the afterlife most prominently. It is imposition of "later" ideas, however, which is central here; the question being asked of these passages is have Muslims ever read any of these verses so as to support the use of sabab as a technical term? What could have been made of the passages is irrelevant; what was done with them is vital.

122. Muqātil, al-Ashbāh, p. 174; al-Dāmaghānī, Islāh, p. 225; cf. al-Farrā' (d. 207), Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān II 399.
123. See for example Q. 7/40 and E. F. F. Bishop, "Gates and Doors in the New Testament and the Qur'ān", Glasgow University Oriental Society Transactions, 22 (1967-1968) 39-45.
124. Lane, Arabic-English Lexicon IV 1285.
125. For an analysis of intra-Quranic considerations of the revelatory process see QS 36-38.
126. Muqātil, Tafsīr, MS Ahmet III 74; for further details see below Chapter III, p. 88.
127. Mujāhid, Tafsīr Mujāhid; for further details see below Chapter III pp. 84-85.
128. Sufyān al-Thawrī, b. 95/96 or 97, d. 161; see GAS I 518-519; Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm: for further details see below Chapter III pp. 84-85. Other early works, such as al-Farrā', Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān; Abū 'Ubayda (d. 210), Majāz al-Qur'ān; al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204), Risāla, are also free of the term.
129. Muḥammad ibn Ishāq ibn Yasār, b. 85, d. 150; see GAS I 288-290; Sīra Rasūl Allāh.
130. Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn 'Umar al-Wāqidī, b. 130, d. 207; see GAS I 294-297; Kitāb al-Maghāzī.
131. Al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Book LX.
132. Muslim, al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Book XLI.
133. Al-Ṭabarī, Jāmi' al-Bayān; for further details see below Chapter III pp. 88-89.
134. Abū Ja'far Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Naḥḥās, date of birth unknown, d. 338; see GAL I 132, S I 201; GAS I 48; al-Nāsikh wa'l-mansūkh fī'l-Qur'ān al-Karīm.

135. On these verses see below Chapter III, pp. 162 and 359.
136. Attention is paid within Chapter III below to al-Ṭabarī's use of the word sabab in what is clearly the emerging technical status of the word but a status certainly not reached in al-Ṭabarī's time.
137. Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Jaṣṣāṣ, b. 305, d. 370; see GAS I 444-445; EI<sup>2</sup> II 486.
138. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb Nuzūl al-Qurʾān, pp. 5-6.
139. Al-Ḥaskānī, date of birth unknown, date of death uncertain but probably between 470 and 490; on him see the introduction to Shawāhid al-Tanzīl, pp. 5-12; also see GAL S II 820 for a listing of a Mukhtaṣar Shawāhid al-Tanzīl.
140. It has been pointed out to me by Douglas Karim Crow, McGill University, that the term sabab is used in Imāmī works with reference especially to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and the claim to receive divine inspiration by sabab, i.e., the "tent rope" connecting heaven and the imām; the non-use of the term by al-Ḥaskānī in his work may well be a result of a process early on in Shiʿite theology whereby sabab evolved a specific technical theological status in connection with the process of revelation. Of course, the use of the word is widespread in all early Islamic discussions over freewill and the "power-to-act" as well.

## CHAPTER II

### ASBĀB AL-NUZŪL

#### THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON THEIR EXEGETICAL ROLE

Extensive discussions of the role of asbāb al-nuzūl material in Quranic exegesis are far more infrequent in medieval Muslim literature than one may have hoped or perhaps expected. Likely places for such considerations would be introductions to actual exegetical works or within the genre of literature which has become known as ʿulūm al-Qurʾān. Within the most famous books of that latter type, al-Suyūṭī (d. 911), Al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān and al-Zarkashī (d. 794), Al-Burhān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān, chapters are indeed found on the topic; their late date of composition and the ahistorical approach employed by both authors in their treatment of the subject has led, one suspects, to a blurring of any possible historical development in the conception of the topic and a glossing of contentious points by dogmatic assertion. Thus in order to come to any type of comprehensive understanding of the role of the sabab in exegesis through a study of theoretical considerations of the topic, a series of significant texts from various centuries would be the most promising source. Unfortunately, a survey of earlier, likely texts reveals that very little consideration of the topic of the sabab took place at all, at least in any kind of abstract way, in a form other than a discussion which takes place within the context of a limited discussion of the role of the sabab in the exegesis of a specific verse.

Probably the earliest work which gathers together any theoretical considerations about the Qurʾān is Abū ʿUbayd (d. 224)<sup>1</sup>, Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān. Despite its title, the work deals with much more than the merits of

recitation of various portions of the Qur'ān, the topic often understood by the rubric Faḍā'il. While the first half of the text does deal with "faḍā'il" topics,<sup>2</sup> the rest of the work deals with such topics as variant readings, collection of the Qur'ān and the language of the Qur'ān. To some extent, this pattern is duplicated in later Faḍā'il works, such as al-Bukhārī (d. 256), Kitāb Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān,<sup>3</sup> and the commentary on that work by Ibn Kathīr<sup>4</sup> (d. 774), entitled Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān.<sup>5</sup> Folios 51a to 52b of Abū 'Ubayd's work are entitled "Chapter on the revelation of the Qur'ān in Mecca and Medina and the description of the first and the last (to be revealed)"; dealt with here are all sorts of matters dealing with respective ordering of the passages of the Qur'ān--the first and the last verses to be revealed, the order of Meccan and Medinan sūras including statements on how one determines that (for example by the presence of ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū in Medinan sūras) and also on the actual process of revelation over a period of some twenty years, but nowhere is the idea of the relevance of an individual sabab for a verse broached.

The next similar and promising text would appear to be the introduction to the tafsīr by al-Ṭabarī (d. 310) which is comprised of over one hundred pages of text in the Shākir edition. Al-Ṭabarī even appears to have named the section separately: Risālat al-Tafsīr.<sup>6</sup> Al-Ṭabarī's concerns in this introduction are, however, far from asbāb al-nuzūl; most of his space is devoted to a discussion of the language of the Qur'ān, especially the meaning of the seven ahruf, the collection of the Qur'ān and the distinction between tafsīr and ta'wīl, ending finally with an explication of "the names of the Qur'ān, its sūras and its verses".



That similar topics are covered in the introduction to the work by al-Tabarī's near contemporary, al-Anbārī (d. 328)<sup>7</sup>, Kitāb idāh al-waqf wa'l-ibtidā' fī kitāb allāh,<sup>8</sup> would indicate that these were the topics of controversy during that era and that perhaps asbāb al-nuzūl was not of great concern.<sup>9</sup>

In 1954 Arthur Jeffery published two independent works under the title Muqaddimatān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān. The first work in this book, and the most extensive, is the introduction to the anonymous Kitāb al-Mabānī li-naẓm al-ma'ānī.<sup>10</sup> The author devotes considerable space to a listing of the chronological order of sūras and then to a consideration of the arrangement (tartīb, naẓm) of the Qur'ān. Here the process of revelation comes in for documentation, the author stating that the Qur'ān was revealed according to the needs of the situation ('ala ḥasab al-ḥāja) but that the arrangement of the Qur'ān as it stands today mirrors that in the lawḥ maḥfūz.<sup>11</sup> The further implications of the "revelation by need" are not explored in any way other than by its naked assertion. The second text in the book, the muqaddima to the tafsīr by Ibn 'Aṭīya (d. 541),<sup>12</sup> al-Jāmi' al-muḥarrar,<sup>13</sup> is similar in its treatment of topics to al-Tabarī's tafsīr, covering the merits (faḍl) of the Qur'ān, the seven ahruf and the i'jāz of the Qur'ān only.

The earliest discussion of the role of the sabab which I have been able to locate is found in Ibn Taymīya (d. 728),<sup>14</sup> Muqaddima fī uṣūl al-tafsīr.<sup>15</sup> This title, it is to be noted, is that given to the work by the editor. The actual title page of the manuscript calls the work Qā'ida 'aẓīmat al-qadr sharīfa fī tabyīn mā yu'īnu 'alā fahm al-Qur'ān<sup>16</sup> while the introduction to the actual text of the work implies

the title to be Qawā'id kullīya tu'īnu 'alā fahm al-Qur'ān;<sup>17</sup> it is thus probably identical to the only work al-Suyūṭī lists in his bibliographic introduction to Al-Itqān by Ibn Taymīya: Qawā'id fī 'l-tafsīr.<sup>18</sup> Regardless of the actual title, the work is definitely a source for al-Suyūṭī's discussion and is quoted extensively in Al-Itqān. Ibn Taymīya's concern with the sabab is brought about by the presence of so much contradictory material within the collections; to explain how the apparent ikhtilāf arose among the "pious ancestors" (salaf) is the point of his chapter in which discussion of the sabab arises.<sup>19</sup>

The earliest extensive discussion of the role of asbāb al-nuzūl, as suggested above, would appear to be found in al-Zarkashī, Al-Burhān. This work is the model after which al-Suyūṭī patterned his whole treatise and certainly after which he patterned most of his discussion on the asbāb al-nuzūl.<sup>20</sup> This, in fact, al-Suyūṭī himself makes clear in his introduction to Al-Itqān: he had first written a book al-Taḥbīr fī 'ulūm al-tafsīr<sup>21</sup> but then he discovered al-Burhān and wrote, as a result, Al-Itqān.

Prior to discovering the work of al-Zarkashī, al-Suyūṭī had known only two reasonably comprehensive, but unsatisfactory 'ulūm al-Qur'ān works:<sup>22</sup> one was by Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Kāfiyājī, (d. 879),<sup>23</sup> the other by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Bulqīnī, (d. 824), entitled: Mawāqī' al-'ulūm min mawāqī' al-nujūm.<sup>24</sup> The fact that both of these authors are relatively late and that these two works are the only ones al-Suyūṭī bothers to mention as being similar to his work confirms what has been suggested above that al-Zarkashī and al-Suyūṭī are the most significant statements extant on 'ulūm al-Qur'ān.

The sources quoted by al-Suyūṭī within his specific chapter on ma'rifa sabab al-nuzūl likewise prove to be of little help in finding other statements on the role of the sabab. Among those mentioned are, obviously enough, al-Wāḥidī (d. 468) and al-Ja'barī, (d. 732) both of whom are connected with actual books on asbāb and have been dealt with above.<sup>25</sup> Another person mentioned is Ibn Daqīq al-'Īd (d. 702),<sup>26</sup> although it may be significant that al-Zarkashī attributes a quotation, credited by al-Suyūṭī to Ibn Daqīq, to a certain unidentified Abū 'l-Faṭḥ al-Qushayrī.<sup>27</sup> Finally, a work by Ibn Ḥabīb al-Nīsābūrī (d. 406),<sup>28</sup> al-Tanbih 'alā faḍl 'ulūm al-Qur'ān is quoted by both al-Zarkashī and al-Suyūṭī, but it is used very infrequently;<sup>29</sup> one feels justified in presuming that the work was not considered by either author to be of great significance, despite its promising title, and that, therefore, not too much is being lost by its absence.<sup>30</sup>

Thus we are left only with al-Suyūṭī and al-Zarkashī. Al-Suyūṭī's text, being effectively an edition and expansion of al-Zarkashī, does serve as a useful basis for the discussion of the role of the sabab by bringing together what few sources there were available to him as well as his own opinion on the matter, although the ahistorical nature of his approach, as mentioned above, does leave something to be desired for our aims here.

Al-Suyūṭī's chapter on ma'rifa sabab al-nuzūl takes a prominent position on his treatment of the Quranic sciences. The section is ninth, out of a total of eighty chapters, and follows on chapters devoted to other considerations of the process of revelation, for example, the time

and place of revelation.<sup>31</sup> The discussion in the chapter itself is composed of answers to a series of five questions, which follows after a brief bibliographic introduction and a quote from al-Ja'barī to the effect that the Qur'ān was revealed in two ways, "spontaneously" (ibtidā') or "as a result of a particular event (in the life of Muḥammad) or a query (put to Muḥammad)".<sup>32</sup> This, of course, is the theoretical basis of the entire concept of the sabab, that the revelation of the Qur'ān responded, at times, to the needs and requirements in the life of Muḥammad, and that those situations and the Quranic response to them are recorded in the asbāb al-nuzūl material. The rest of al-Suyūṭī's chapter is then structured in the following way, dealing approximately with these topics:

Question 1: Of what use is the sabab to exegesis? To this question, six points are delineated in response.<sup>33</sup>

Question 2: Is a law derived from the generality of the expression (of the verse) or according to the particularity of the sabab?<sup>34</sup>

Question 3: How does the sabab act in considerations of context?<sup>35</sup>

Question 4: What criteria make a valid sabab report?<sup>36</sup>

Question 5: Can one verse have more than one sabab?<sup>37</sup>

In attempting to discern the theoretical position on the role of the sabab, al-Suyūṭī's answers to the first three of these questions are of vital importance, the fourth and fifth questions being only marginally related. The reply to Question 1 comes as a response to a statement of objection to the entire topic: the sabab is of no value, it is claimed, because "it is analogous to (lit.: flows in the course of) history". Such an objection may simply be implying that some exegetes felt that they could leave the sabab out of consideration because it was

of no use in exegesis, since it was "only" history and thus a separate discipline; on the other hand, a more serious objection is perhaps being raised, that the Qur'ān cannot be treated as historically conditioned in any sense (as the sabab may imply), for it is an uncreated work, written on the celestial tablet (lawḥ mahfūz). It can hardly be claimed that what follows in al-Suyūṭī constitutes a really effective response to the first interpretation of the objection suggested above, even less so to the second; one may well doubt that the objection was really being taken seriously in al-Suyūṭī's time (or al-Zarkashī's where the exact same phrasing is found), the statement acting more as a convenient point of departure for the following discourse rather than as the basis of serious discussion.

Be that as it may, al-Suyūṭī then moves on to what is our central concern here and lists as part of his response to this question a series of six points comprising the functions the sabab fulfills in relationship to the proper understanding of the Qur'ān, thus demonstrating its functional value. As the first point<sup>38</sup> al-Suyūṭī states that the sabab reveals "Knowledge of the aspect of divine wisdom which provoked the promulgation of the ruling (contained in the verse)"; that is, the sabab reveals God's concern with his creation through his action in providing mankind with laws to guide his life. Sabab here is clearly the metaphorical "tent rope" connecting heaven and earth.<sup>39</sup>

The second point<sup>40</sup> consists of the idea that the sabab can reveal "the specification of the ruling by (the sabab), according to (the opinion) of those who hold that the precept is connected to the particularity of the sabab". A law in the Qur'ān, according to this idea, can be understood

as having either a specific relevance to the inhabitants of Arabia in the seventh century (AD) only or as being limited in its scope of application in later times by the circumstances of history at the time of its revelation. The important proviso here, however, is that this is true (for the most part) only according to those who hold that opinion, for it is quite clear that al-Suyūṭī does not agree with this point of view. Indeed, al-Suyūṭī gives no examples of exactly what is meant by this statement and it is only when one comes to Question 2 in his discussion that the full extent of the implications of the statement becomes clear.

Question 2 deals with the problem of interpreting the Qur'ān: are legal rulings to be derived according to the generality of the wording of the verse or according to a particular situation implied by the sabab? Al-Suyūṭī clearly states that the former proposition is the soundest one. Many famous verses with widespread legal ramifications, he points out, were revealed concerning specific people (that is, with a specific sabab). For example, āyat al-zihār (Q. 58/1) was revealed about Salama ibn Ṣakhr,<sup>41</sup> āyat al-li'fān (Q. 24/6) about Hilāl ibn Umayya<sup>42</sup> and Q. 24/11-12 about 'Ā'isha specifically.<sup>43</sup> To interpret these verses not by the generality of their wording would imply that the ruling was limited to the specific situation given in the sabab. Quoted in this connection is al-Zamakhsharī's rejection of that position: "It is possible that the sabab is specific while the threat (wa'īd) is general, for all who rejoice in that evil deed are included (yatanāwalu) and that (threat) will certainly follow the same course as intimated."<sup>44</sup>

It is on this occasion that al-Suyūṭī quotes Ibn Taymiyya also,<sup>45</sup> the latter putting forth forcefully the point of view that one could not be considered a Muslim if one held that the ruling of a verse was to be

limited to the person identified in the sabab; this is, of course, the generally accepted notion in Islam and the basis of the elaboration of fiqh and not something unique to Ibn Taymīya's particular polemic. As he states it, a verse is not limited to a person specified by the sabab, but it includes, mutanāwil, that person along with everyone else in the same situation (bi-manzilatihī).<sup>46</sup>

In certain cases, however, al-Suyūṭī acknowledges that specification by the sabab does, indeed, take place. His third point in dealing with Question 1 on the value of the sabab suggests that "perhaps the wording (of the verse) is general but there exists evidence of specification of (the wording). If the sabab is known, then the specification is limited to what is required by the form of (the sabab). The inclusion of the sabab (in the derivation of the law) is the defining factor (qat'ī) and adducing (the sense of the sabab) by ijtihād is prohibited."<sup>47</sup>

Thus it seems clear that, on certain occasions, verses are made specific, but the key would appear to lie in the notion of the "evidence of specification (of the wording)", al-dalīl 'alā takhṣīṣihī. The full implications of this statement arise once more in Question 2, specifically in the tanbīh ("additional note") at the end.<sup>48</sup> There, as Wansbrough has already pointed out, al-Suyūṭī embarks on "a discussion of the relative al-atqā in Q. 92:17 'He who is (the) most pious shall be spared'. Desire to restrict that reference to Abū Bakr provoked some very dogmatic observations on the grammatical function of the definite article."<sup>49</sup>

The reason is, for al-Suyūṭī at least, that, in theory, a sabab does not make a verse specific in and by itself; it can only confirm a specification known by some other means, as in the case above, by the qualities of the definite article. In other instances, it would seem

to be the prior existence of a law which then needs Quranic support that acts as the "other means" of specification. But, as point three of Question 1 certainly does indicate, the sabab at least in theory overrides ijtihād (and ijmā' in al-Zarkashī it is to be noted<sup>50</sup>) within the discussions of specification. This is not really very surprising in a sense because the sabab is generally considered a part of the prophetic sunna, abiding by its rules and regulations, and thus within the hierarchy of the uṣūl to be rated second only to the Qur'ān. Question 4 in al-Suyūṭī's discussion delves into this topic, prefaced by al-Wāḥidī's only statement of his criterion of asbāb reports, that they be valid ḥadīth reports.<sup>51</sup> For al-Suyūṭī, it is to be noted, this is one method of separating the wheat from the chaff in the voluminous assortment of asbāb material; his actual work on the asbāb often quotes the judgement of the isnād by ḥadīth criteria for the individual reports.<sup>52</sup>

A further aspect of the problem of specification is brought up by al-Suyūṭī in his Question 3, where the possibility of a verse which has a specific intent but which has been put within a context of general intent due to the dictates of naẓm/tartīb is broached.<sup>53</sup> It is important to note at this time that all the discussions of "generality of the wording" or "specification of the wording" are based on an unenunciated theory of the "plain meaning" of the Qur'ān. The "plain meaning" intended by al-Suyūṭī in these instances is, of course, simply the meaning that he feels to be "authoritative" at that point.<sup>54</sup> There is not and many would argue that there cannot be, any universally accepted "plain meaning" of any given text; any interpretation varies according to one's own presuppositions and environmental background. Thus, it may be



fairly argued, that al-Suyūṭī's problem of a specific verse versus the general context is one that arises only through approaching the Qur'ān with certain presuppositions and expectations of desired results. The desire is to use a given Quranic passage to support an already existing law; the result is a possible rupture of the context of the Quranic passage in question. Al-Suyūṭī cites only one Quranic example of this phenomenon in action at this point of his discussion: Q. 4/58, whose legal intent is separate from the context created by Q. 4/51 and following. Verse 51 begins "Have you not seen those who were given a portion of the book...?", referring, by general consensus in interpretation, to the Jews of seventh century (AD) Arabia and their conspiracy to hide the description of Muḥammad in the Torah; this description of Muḥammad, al-Suyūṭī explains, was their "covenantal obligation" or "trust" (amāna). Verse 58 then goes on to state "God orders you to give the trusts (amānāt) to their owners". If one were governed in interpretation by the specific sabab, verse 58 would refer to the Jews also; but, in fact, al-Suyūṭī argues, verse 58 is general, in reference to everything given in trust by anyone. Thus, a specific verse (Q. 4/51) has been joined to a general context (Q. 4/58).<sup>55</sup>

The whole topic of the "joining together" of verses and the subsequent problems is treated more extensively in a separate chapter in Al-Itqān and especially in Al-Burhān where al-Zarkashī devotes the very next chapter after ma'rifa asbāb al-nuzūl to ma'rifa munāsabāt al-āyāt.<sup>56</sup> It is also to be noted that the relationship between this genre and that of al-waqf wa'l-ibtidā' is quite close also; although the latter is often thought to be connected only to tajwīd, it is exegetical in intent and probably in origin.<sup>57</sup>

While it requires leaving the order of points as discussed by al-Suyūṭī, it seems sensible to deal with point five in answer to Question 1 now, for it too deals with the problem of specification and the sabab but from the other way around than the previous points. A verse may appear in its "plain meaning" to be specific or limited in its application but, in fact, when the sabab is taken into account, the true intent of the verse is revealed; thus, the sabab acts to "reject the illusion of limitation".<sup>58</sup> The prime example of this proposition is a quote from al-Shāfi'ī found in both al-Suyūṭī and al-Zarkashī but not in extenso in any other text consulted.<sup>59</sup> The problem here revolves around Q. 6/145 "Say: I do not find in what is revealed to me anything forbidden to one who eats it, except dead animals, blood poured out, pork - it is an abomination - or impure (meat) hallowed by (a name) other than God's". The difficulty here clearly is that, in fact, foods other than those mentioned in this list are known to be forbidden to man.<sup>60</sup> Abrogation of the verse would seem to be a logical answer but apparently not a popular one, although it does find minority mention in the exegetical tradition.<sup>61</sup> Al-Shāfi'ī's answer, however, was to say that the verse was revealed specifically about the unbelievers who "forbade what God permitted and permitted what God forbade"; the specific items listed in this verse were those things the unbelievers permitted of what God had forbidden. Thus the verse listed only the relevant items and "did not intend to permit other things beside them. The intention was to assert the forbidding, not assert the permitting."<sup>62</sup> Thus, while the verse would appear to limit the actual number of things forbidden, that limitation is rejected by consideration of the sabab which acts to establish the context of the verse in question.

It is evident that in the above example, the sabab serves primarily an exegetical function by taking the Quranic phraseology and elaborating it through narrative embellishment in order to remove the apparent intra-Quranic conflict, and that the sabab does not simply act as an external verificant of time and place of revelation. This trend is actually developed by al-Suyūṭī's point four in answer to Question 1 where the explanation is given that the sabab serves to "explicate the meaning and eliminate ambiguity". Several quotes preface the actual examples of this aspect of the sabab function, all of which witness the importance of the sabab in explication of the meaning of a verse.<sup>63</sup> Two Quranic examples which al-Suyūṭī gives are treated extensively below where, once again, it is the "plain meaning" which would seem to contradict the generally accepted legal derivation connected with the verse and thus the sabab plays a role only slightly different from point five treated above.<sup>64</sup>

Another example given by al-Suyūṭī in dealing with this point is what he calls "the most difficult" example, in the case of Q. 3/188. "Think not that those who rejoice in what they have brought...that they are in a place of security from the punishment."

Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam said: "If everyone who rejoices in what he has brought and likes to be praised for what he has not done will be punished, then all of us will be punished," until Ibn 'Abbās explained that the verse was revealed about the ahl al-Kitāb when the Prophet asked them about something and they concealed (the answer) from him and told him something else. It appeared that they had told him what he had asked them and they asked to be praised for that.<sup>65</sup>

Once again, the sabab acts to correct misinterpretation, not by extensive

historical detail of time and place of revelation but by exegetical explanation through specification of a narrative context.

Finally point six in answer to Question 1 indicates another function of the sabab, "knowledge about whom the verse was revealed and identification of the ambiguous in it".<sup>66</sup> It is the haggadic<sup>67</sup> function of the sabab which is alluded to here, the exegetical aspect that fills in the details especially in narrative passages. Only one example is given by al-Suyūṭī, that Marwān thought Q. 46/17 was revealed about 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr until 'Ā'isha corrected him on that score and told him of its correct sabab: thus, 'Ā'isha is pictured as stating that the sabab is the key to identification.<sup>68</sup> The methodological principle established, al-Suyūṭī does not even bother to state the correct identification; he does however deal with the topic more extensively in a later chapter of Al-Itqān.<sup>69</sup>

Considering al-Suyūṭī's presentation as a whole, it should be evident that he sees the halakhic<sup>70</sup> function of the sabab as primary; specific and general aspects of wording are to be verified through the sabab. The sabab does however have other functions. Exegetical examples have been noted although they seem often to be close to the halakhic specification role; the haggadic function of the sabab seems minor according to al-Suyūṭī's summary, although it is certainly manifested. Finally, the significance of point one in answer to Question 1 cannot be overlooked; the sabab acts in a historical-theological way, acting as the guarantor of the veracity of God's revelation to man and his concern for his creation; there is a polemical and theological value to the sabab over and above its exegetical role.

## Notes to Chapter II

1. Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām, b. 154, d. 224; see GAL I 106-107, S I 166-167; GAS I 48.
2. Berlin Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung, Petermann 449; the first 35 folios of the 58 folio manuscript are devoted to 'faḍā'il'.
3. Al-Sahīḥ VI 473-522.
4. 'Imād al-Dīn Abī'l-Fidā' Ismā'īl ibn Kathīr, b. 701, d. 774; see GAL II 49, S II 48-49.
5. Pp. 1-58 at the end of Volume IV of his Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Azīm.
6. Jāmi' al-Bayān I 8-113.
7. Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim al-Anbārī, b. 231, d. 328; see GAL I 119, S I 182-183; GAS I 18.
8. Iḡāḥ I 4-418.
9. Within the course of al-Ṭabarī's tafsīr there are occasions on which he does deal with the value of the sabab but only within a limited context of a single verse. Examples will be noted below in Chapter III.
10. Pp. 5-250 of Jeffery's text. The full title of the work is found on p. 6 of the text. The work was begun by its author in the year 425 according to the text itself.
11. See passim, al-faṣl al-thālith, especially p. 40.
12. Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥaqq ibn 'Aṭīya al-Gharnāṭī, b. 481, d. 541; see GAL I 412, S I 732 where date of death is given as 542.
13. Pp. 252-293 of Jeffery's text. At least the first volume of the entire tafsīr, including the muqaddima, has been published--Cairo, 1974.
14. Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥalīm ibn Taymīya, b. 661, d. 728; see GAL II 100-105, S II 119-126; EI<sup>2</sup> III 951-955.
15. See pp. 44-49.
16. See Muqaddima, p. [27], facsimile of the manuscript title page.
17. Muqaddima, p. 33.
18. Al-Itgān I 19 (lines 5-6).

19. Further details concerning Ibn Taymīya's ideas on the sabab are found below in the course of analysis of al-Suyūṭī's discussion, pp. 50-51.
20. See K. E. Nolin, "The Itqān and its Sources", especially pp. 2-31. Note how al-Suyūṭī's text has acted as the source, generally unacknowledged, of most of the modern ʿulūm al-Qur'ān works; see for example Manāʾ al-Qaṭṭān, Mabāḥith fī ʿulūm al-Qur'ān.
21. See al-Itqān I 6-10; copies of al-Ṭaḥbīr do exist (for example, Chester Beatty 4655 and 5112) but I have not been able to avail myself of any of them.
22. Al-Itqān I 4.
23. Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Muḥyawī Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Kāfiyajī, b. 788, d. 879; see GAL II 114-115, S II 140-141. A work by him with the title Al-Taysīr fī qawā'id al-tafsīr is known (see GAL and Princeton Yahuda 4515 = Mach 118) but I have not seen it; al-Suyūṭī gives no title.
24. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿUthmān ibn Raslān al-Bulqīnī Jalāl al-Dīn, b. 762, d. 824; see GAL II 112-113, S II 139 where this title is not listed although a tafsīr by him is extant, for example British Library OR 1553-1557.
25. See above Chapter I, pp. 12-13 and 15-19.
26. See above Chapter I, page 24, for a reference to al-ʿId's ambiguous involvement in asbāb al-nuzūl.
27. Al-Itqān I 83, al-Burhān I 22. For the tendency of al-Suyūṭī to attribute quotes to different authorities than al-Zarkashī see Nolin, pp. 80-84.
28. Presumably the same Ibn Ḥabīb al-Nīsābūrī dealt with above in Chapter I, pp. 18-19 although this work is not noted in GAS I 47.
29. See the index to al-Itqān IV 280, al-Burhān IV 502.
30. A number of other works with promising-sounding titles have come to my attention but by title only; for example Abū Bakr al-Udhfawī (d. 388) Al-istighnā' fī ʿulūm al-Qur'ān (see Ibn al-Jazarī, Ghayāt al-Nihāya, entry number 3240); the above survey of texts, then, can in no way pretend to be a complete inventory of possible texts, merely a view of a few significant texts which are reasonably readily available.
31. Cf. al-Zarkashī's arrangement of al-Burhān: Maʾrifa asbāb al-nuzūl, nawʾ 1; maʾrifat al-Makkī wa'l-Madanī, nawʾ 9 -- out of a possible of 47 chapters.

32. Al-Itqān I 82; also see QS 178.
33. Al-Itqān I 82-85; cf. al-Burhān I 22-29 a virtually identical survey with a few changes in internal order; for further details of the comparison see below, pp. 49-55.
34. Al-Itqān I 85-87.
35. Al-Itqān I 87-88; cf. al-Burhān I 32.
36. Al-Itqān I 89-91.
37. Al-Itqān I 91-98; cf. al-Burhān I 29-32.
38. Al-Itqān I 83; also al-Burhān I 22, first point.
39. On the analysis of the term sabab see above Chapter I , pp. 27-32.
40. Al-Itqān I 82; also al-Burhān I 22, second point.
41. For these examples also see Ibn Taymīya, Muqaddima, p. 44 and al-Burhān I 24-25; the latter includes all those examples in his discussion of the "rejection of the illusion of limitation", see further below p. 54 . The identification of Salama as connected to Q. 58/1 is problematic; cf. al-Wāhidī, Asbāb nuzūl al-Qur'ān, pp. 433-434, al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb al-nuqūl fī asbāb al-nuzūl, p. 205, neither of whom mention this person. Also see the extensive comments of the editor of Ibn Taymīya, Muqaddima, pp. 44-45, note 3. The example is probably derived from an unknown traditional source listing the examples "par excellence" for the point taken. Such widespread copying of traditional opinion is a revealing insight into medieval scholarship.
42. See al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, pp. 328-330; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 124.
43. See al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, pp. 330-355; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, pp. 125-126; al-Suyūṭī also lists a number of other examples in more detail; one of these (Q. 2/204) is dealt with below in Chapter III pp. 325-329.
44. Al-Itqān I 85; also al-Burhān I 32. See al-Zamakhsharī, al-Kashshāf II 1631 (ad Q. 104/1); his purpose in the statement seems to be to reconcile the numerous possible different identifications of the protagonist.
45. Al-Itqān I 86-87; Ibn Taymīya, Muqaddima, pp. 44-47.

46. The reasoning involved here is inference a minori ad maius, what applies in a less important case will certainly apply in a more important case, equivalent to gal wa-hōmer in the seven middot of Hillel; see D. Daube, "Rabbinic methods of interpretation and Hellenistic rhetoric", HUCA XXII (1949) 239-264 esp. pp. 251-252 and J. Bowker, The Targums and Rabbinic Literature, pp. 315-318. Also QS 166-170.
47. Al-Itqān I 82; cf. al-Burhān I 22-23, al-Zarkashī's fourth point; al-Zarkashī's wording differs slightly.
48. Al-Itqān I 87.
49. QS 178.
50. Al-Burhān I 23; note also al-Itqān I 85, the beginning of Question 2 suggests the same: "verses are limited to their asbāb by agreement due to an indication which exists suggesting that."
51. See al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, p. 4; also QS 179 as well as Chapter I, pp. 25-26 above.
52. See numerous examples in Chapter III below, for example ad Q. 2/114.
53. See also al-Burhān I 25-26 which al-Suyūṭī has lifted in toto uncredited; al-Zarkashī is however discussing what is actually al-Suyūṭī's point five, see below p. 54.
54. On the "plain meaning" of scripture see especially Raphael Loewe, "The 'Plain' meaning of Scripture in Early Jewish Exegesis", Papers of the Institute of Jewish Studies London I 140-185; see also Chapter III below especially ad Q. 2/115 at p. 201.
55. See also Ibn al-ʿArabī, Abkām al-Qurʾān I 449-450 especially "question three".
56. Al-Burhān I 35-52; al-Itqān III 323-338, nawʿ 62.
57. For an example of this see al-Anbārī, Kitāb ḥdāḥ al-waqf waʾl-ibtidāʾ II 778 (ad Q. 21/95) and cf. Rippin, "Qurʾān 21:95", JSS, XXIV (1979) 43-53.
58. Al-Itqān I 84; also al-Burhān I 23-26, fifth point, but this includes much material included by al-Suyūṭī elsewhere, for example, see point two above.
59. For example al-Jassās, Abkām al-Qurʾān II 16-17; al-Qurtubī, al-Jāmiʿ li-abkām al-Qurʾān VII 116, where the interpretation is credited to al-Shāfiʿī but the sabab is quoted in extremely short form.



60. Makkī, Al-Idāh li-nāsikh al-Qur'ān wa-mansūkhīhi, pp. 249-250, suggests that meat of domestic donkeys, predatory animals having eyeteeth and birds with claws are forbidden by the prophetic sunna thus forming additions to this list. Also see Ibn al-'Arabī, Aḥkām II 756.
61. See for example, Makkī, Al-Idāh, pp. 249-250. The reluctance to admit the verse as abrogated undoubtedly stems from the fact that the additional forbidden foods are found in the sunna only (see note 60) and thus would require abrogation of the Qur'ān by the sunna, a category generally discouraged although employed on numerous occasions in fact: see Burton, The Collection of the Qur'ān, especially pp. 50-59.
62. This interpretation is only one of many suggested for the verse in the exegetical sources: chronological considerations play a large part in al-Qurṭubī's discussions al-Jāmi' VII 115-119; note also Ibn al-'Arabī, Aḥkām II 755-759; al-Jaṣṣās, Aḥkām II 16-23.
63. Al-Itqān I 82-84; see Al-Burhān I 22 and 27-29; al-Zarkashī's third and sixth points combine to form point four in al-Suyūṭī. Al-Suyūṭī quotes al-Wāḥidī, Ibn Daqīq and Ibn Taymīya (see his Muqaddima, p. 47) as authorities for his quotations.
64. See below Chapter III ad Q. 2/115 and 2/158.
65. Al-Itqān I 83; also al-Burhān I 27; similar to reports in al-Bukhārī al-Ṣaḥīḥ VI 73-74; Muslim, al-Ṣaḥīḥ V 648-649 report 7; also Ahmad ibn Hanbal, al-Musnad I 298 bottom.
66. Al-Itqān I 84-85; not in al-Burhān as a function of the sabab; this perhaps reflects al-Zarkashī's definition of sabab over-against al-Suyūṭī.
67. The term haggadic is used here and throughout this thesis in its basic sense of referring to commentaries on the Qur'ān which have as their primary aim the interpretation and expansion of the text of the Qur'ān in an edifying, entertaining and/or moralizing way with an emphasis on narrative parts of the text and commentary rather than legal passages. See further below Chapter III C: "Introduction to the Exegetical Sources" pp. 83-89 and QS 122-148.

While the word haggadic, like other similar terms--halakhic, masoretic, midrashic--derives from the Jewish tradition, the use of such terminology does not necessarily imply a borrowing by Islamic scholars from Judaism; the evidence of terminological calques and methodological parallels as put forth in QS 119-246 however does suggest a substantive interaction between Islam and Judaism which leads to the inference that the use of descriptive terminology appropriate to both traditions is at least meaningful and informative.

68. See also al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 194.
69. Al-Itqān IV 58-101 (naw' 69-71); also see al-Burhān I 155-163 (naw' 6).
70. The term halakhic is used here and throughout this thesis in its basic sense of referring to commentaries on the Qur'ān which have as their primary aim the presentation of the Qur'ān as a source of law and the working through the text, by means of a standard set of rules, so as to underpin legal deductions from the text of the Qur'ān. See further below Chapter III C: "Introduction to the Exegetical Sources" pp. 80-83 and QS 170-202.

CHAPTER III  
ASBĀB AL-NUZŪL  
THEIR USE AND DEVELOPMENT  
IN THE EXEGETICAL CONTEXT

A. Previous Scholarship on the Question.

As has already been suggested in Chapter I above, there has not been much serious attention paid to the genre or to the concept or to the role of asbāb reports in exegesis. The works of Goldziher<sup>1</sup> and Nöldeke/Schwally<sup>2</sup> both reveal much greater attention to (very important) textual matters than to classical methods and materials of interpretation.

Richard Bell, in the version of his Introduction to the Qur'ān as reformulated by W. M. Watt, gives clear expression to what appears to be the general assumption on the nature of the asbāb material. First, Bell understands his theory of the short sections of revelation, which were then collated to form the Qur'ān, to be supported by the evidence of the asbāb al-nuzūl; the different (historical) contexts in which the individual verses were revealed indicates that the Qur'ān may be broken up into short segments, each corresponding to a different situation in the life of Muḥammad and his community.<sup>3</sup> The actual reports ground the Qur'ān in its specific historical context and provide a chronological framework for the Qur'ān.

The chief basis for the dating of passages and verses in eyes of Muslim scholars consists of Traditions about Muḥammad...usually to the effect that such and such a passage was revealed in connection with such and such an event. ...Stories of this type are said to deal with 'the occasions of revelation' (asbāb al-nuzūl).<sup>4</sup>

However, in Bell's view, modern scholarship has revealed that "many of the 'occasions' are incidents, unimportant in themselves, whose precise date is unknown."<sup>5</sup> That being so, it is rather difficult to see how then "Muslim scholars" were able to date passages on the basis of the asbāb but this problem Bell does not tackle. The main function of the asbāb then, according to Bell, would seem to be this provision of a means by which to date passages of the Qur'ān. There is, however, a second function also, according to Bell, that of providing exegesis.

The Qur'ān is full of allusions, which were presumably clear at the time of its revelation but were far from clear to later generations. Thus men appeared who claimed to know who was referred to in a particular passage, and what the incident was which occasioned a passage. ...This became a subdivision of the discipline [of tafsīr] known as 'the occasions of revelation' (asbāb al-nuzūl).<sup>6</sup>

Although this statement is somewhat less than fully explanatory, it would seem that Bell saw a second function of the asbāb in providing the "who" and the "what" of Quranic allusion; this is a basic exegetical function of elaboration in order to make the text understandable.

Régis Blachère's Introduction au Coran maintains fairly close agreement with Bell: one of the functions of the asbāb is to remove the obscurities found in the Qur'ān.<sup>7</sup> As well, the asbāb reports seem to serve a chronological function of providing a basis for historical arrangement of the Qur'ān although Blachère is far more skeptical of the matter than is Bell; he recognizes the "vicious circle" involved in the use of the Qur'ān to establish the life of Muḥammad, at the same time as the life of Muḥammad (i.e., the asbāb material) is used to establish the chronology of the Qur'ān.<sup>8</sup> There can be no historical certainty in such a situation,

Blachère recognizes. Additionally, Blachère sees a relationship between abrogation and asbāb; naskh is based upon the knowledge of the chronology of the sūras which is based upon the asbāb reports which are based upon the biographies of Muḥammad.<sup>9</sup>

Harris Birkeland's The Lord Guideth represents a departure from the common assumptions regarding the asbāb as expressed by Bell and Blachère. Birkeland's concern is tracing the exegetical development of the various traditions as they were influenced by a myriad of pressures; various asbāb reports show the influence of basic theological concerns, the theory of 'isma and the notion of ijmā'.<sup>10</sup> Quite clearly, Birkeland urges recognition of the fact that the asbāb reports are simply a specialized part of the total exegetical information, providing exegetical information in narrative form. It is a pity that Birkeland did not develop the theme further.

Paul Nwyia's Exégèse Coranique et langage mystique seems a somewhat unlikely place to find elaboration of the function of asbāb reports in Sunnī exegesis but yet in his treatment of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān within the context of his being the "first major exegete" of the Qur'ān, a number of significant points are made. Rather than adduce material external to the Qur'ān (for example, poetry) in order to clarify the text, Muqātil employs material which places the Qur'ān within its historical context--the sabab; each time the Qur'ān demands it, that is whenever the text is unclear and cannot be made clear by the use of simple glosses (in the "lecture littérale"), historical information is adduced.<sup>11</sup> The main function of the asbāb reports is therefore to remove ambiguity and to relieve "the horror of the uncertain";<sup>12</sup> in this sense, Nwyia adds, "son but n'est pas de faire de

l'histoire, mais de mieux comprendre le sens du verset dont il fait l'exégèse."<sup>13</sup> This, Nwyia states, removes the possibility of extracting any general moral sense or any theological or abstract sense inherent in the Quranic verse; the sabab simply makes the text more understandable.<sup>14</sup> This latter point, however, seems to me to underestimate the power of the simple story-teller to motivate his audience precisely through his careful narrative elaboration; surely Muqātil must have felt that by making the text understandable the moral and theological points (albeit perhaps not the abstract) would become clearer to his audience at the same time as he removed all the questions raised by confrontation with "the horror of the uncertain".

Although John Wansbrough had not read Nwyia's book before writing his Quranic Studies, his work represents an important development, widening and clarification of much of Nwyia's information as well as a building upon all the speculation which came earlier over the role of the sabab. Wansbrough has suggested several functions for the asbāb reports in the context of Quranic Studies.

...the primary purpose of [tafsīr traditions in the ahkām literature] was halakhic: to render explicit that which was seldom more than implicit in the text of scripture, by establishing a specific context for the revelation in question.<sup>15</sup>

However:

...the finding of specific and useful juridical material (ḥukm/ahkām) in the text of scripture was in practice frustrated by the absence of an unambiguous and uncontradictory historical framework. Solutions to the problems resulting from that condition were sought, and for the most part found, by imposing upon the document of revelation a chronological stencil. ...To that end the primary device employed was description of the circumstances of revelation (asbāb al-nuzūl)...<sup>16</sup>

While "...description of the occasions of revelation [is] characteristic of halakhic exegesis but present in underdeveloped form in the haggadic type",<sup>17</sup> it is true that "...elaboration and refinement of the technique [of asbāb] were the work of the halakhists."<sup>18</sup>

Finally,

Reference to abrogation (naskh) [is] the only reason for halakhic interest in the chronological order of revelation.<sup>19</sup>

Four points are central here:

- (1) asbāb originate incidentally in the haggada as a narrative embellishment of the text;
- (2) they are developed in the halakha and have their primary purpose and receive their differentiation from other exegetical material in this context;
- (3) they create a chronology;
- (4) that chronology is central to questions of naskh and ahkām.

John Burton's The Collection of the Qur'ān follows Wansbrough in the view of the intimate connection between naskh and dating ("The date of revelation was ignored in arranging the Qur'ān texts. Dates are relevant only to al nāsikh wa al mansūkh."<sup>20</sup> and between dating and asbāb reports.<sup>21</sup> He also agrees with Wansbrough concerning the basic haggadic character of the reports.<sup>22</sup>

Wansbrough develops his insights into the asbāb al-nuzūl in a significant way in his second book, The Sectarian Milieu, where an actual analysis takes place of the type of material that has found its way into the asbāb texts. His analysis is of the narrative connected to the life of

Muhammad as found especially in the Sīra of Ibn Ishāq. The role of scripture in the narrative account of history is the central problem to which attention is paid; the relationship between the two is found to be expressed by the following two possibilities:

- (a) "Historization": where scripture plays a "dynamic" role in its interaction with the narrative; "history [is] generated by scriptural imagery" and is characterized by keyword (Leitwort) transfer ("paraphrastic versions of scripture in the form of scripture.")<sup>23</sup>
- (b) "Exemplification" where scripture plays an ex post facto or "ornamental" role, being appended to seemingly neutral events (that is, "not flagrantly theocentric versions of events such as military campaigns.")<sup>24</sup>

The process of historization, which occurs through means of keyword transfer, results in narrative passages which are classifiable into a limited range of topoi, the origins (that is, the Sitz im Leben) of which are to be found in "interconfessional polemic". Among the topoi isolated by Wansbrough the following are the major ones.

- (a) Prognosis of Muhammad in Jewish Scripture;
- (b) Jewish rejection of that prognosis;
- (c) Jewish insistence upon miracles for Prophets;
- (d) Jewish rejection of Muhammad's revelation;
- (e) Muslim charge of scriptural falsification;
- (f) Muslim claim to supersede earlier dispensations.<sup>25</sup>

All of these topoi have "a literary history chronologically antecedent to the origins of Islam". It is the elaboration of these topoi, adapted to fit the picture of the Arabian Prophet and within the context of sectarian interconfessional polemic, that has produced major portions of Islamic Salvation History.<sup>26</sup>



Thus Wansbrough treats the literary character of the actual asbāb reports; in this way is demonstrated the narrative-haggadic qualities of these reports and this emphasizes the thought that the reports are haggadic in origin and only in later application do they serve halakhic and chronological functions.

This sketch of earlier scholarship provides the parameters for the following analysis, suggesting likely topics where the role of the sabab can be expected to be found: chronology, abrogation, haggadic and halakhic exegesis.

## Notes to Chapter III A.

1. I. Goldziher, Die Richtungen des Islamischen Koranauslegung.
2. GdQ.
3. W. M. Watt, Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān, p. 74.
4. Watt, Bell's Introduction, p. 108; similar statements are found in the works of Kenneth Cragg, e.g., The House of Islam, chapter 3; The Event of the Qur'ān, passim.
5. Watt, Bell's Introduction, p. 109.
6. Watt, Bell's Introduction, p. 167.
7. Régis Blachère, Introduction au Coran, p. 234.
8. Blachère, Introduction, p. 246.
9. Blachère, Introduction, pp. 242-243.
10. Harris Birkeland, The Lord Guideth, q.v. the index, "al-Wāḥidī".
11. Paul Nywia, Exégèse Coranique et langage mystique, pp. 61-63.
12. "l'horreur de l'incertain"; the phrase is actually Blachère's, see Introduction, p. 233.
13. Nywia, Exégèse Coranique, p. 64.
14. Nywia, Exégèse Coranique, p. 64.
15. QS 185.
16. QS 177.
17. QS 141.
18. QS 177.
19. QS 180.
20. John Burton, The Collection of the Qur'ān, p. 124.
21. Burton, Collection, pp. 15, 147; also see index under asbāb al-nuzūl.
22. Burton, Collection, p. 185.
23. SM 3; also 7-25.
24. SM 3; also 25-31.
25. SM 12-22, 40-42; also 42-49.
26. SM 45.

## B: The Quranic scope of the study

In order to limit the following analysis to a reasonable size, both the Quranic material and the exegetical sources<sup>1</sup> have been restricted. In order to avoid an arbitrary selection of loci probantes, sūra 2, al-baqara, has been chosen in order to provide a representative cross-section of the Qur'ān. The sūra contains a near-ideal mixture of potential haggadic and halakhic material, as the following sketch-outline indicates.

Verses	1 - 29	faith and disbelief
	30 - 39	creation - Adam - Satan
	40 - 86	Biblical history - Moses
	87 - 103	Biblical history - Jews, Jesus, Moses
	104 - 121	Polemic - Muslim, Jewish, Christian
	122 - 142	Biblical history - Abraham
	142 - 167	Islamic self-identity ( <u>qibla</u> , prayer, <u>hajj</u> etc.)
	168 - 203	Juridical problems (food, wills, fast, <u>hajj</u> etc.)
	204 - 214	Salvation history
	215 - 242	Juridical problems ( <u>jihād</u> , marriage, divorce etc.)
	243 - 253	Salvation history
	254 - 260	(mixed)
	261 - 283	Juridical problems (charity, usury)
	284 - 286	faith

Such a distribution of topics should provide an occasion for most exegetes to touch on virtually every conceivable realm of discussion connected with the study of the Qur'ān. Furthermore, the sūra contains a number of abrogated verses, thirty of them according to the analysis of al-Naḥḥās, for example.<sup>2</sup>

The only verses of interest in the actual analysis are, of course, those for which asbāb material is adduced; in order not to prejudice unduly the search for the function of sabab itself, as full as possible a basis of different authors has been employed in order to determine which verses of sūra 2 to study. The works are those of:

- (a) al-Wāḥidī (d. 468), Asbāb nuzūl al-Qur'ān, used here in the edition of Aḥmad Ṣagr, Cairo, 1969, although innumerable prints exist. Reference to the book is abbreviated as "al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb", in order to differentiate it from other works by al-Wāḥidī which are consulted in the course of this study.<sup>3</sup>
- (b) al-ʿIrāqī (d. 567), Asbāb al-nuzūl wa qisṣa al-furqāniya, Chester Beatty manuscript 5199. Reference to this work is abbreviated simply by "al-ʿIrāqī".
- (c) al-Suyūṭī (d. 911), Lubāb al-nuqūl fī asbāb al-nuzūl, used here in the five fascicule edition printed by itself in Cairo, 1382. Reference to this work is abbreviated as "al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb", in order to differentiate it from other works by al-Suyūṭī, which are consulted in the course of this study.<sup>4</sup>
- (d) Berlin 3578, the work incorrectly ascribed to al-Jaʿbarī and assigned, as a result, the title Mukhtaṣar asbāb al-nuzūl; the manuscript stems from the 8th century but the text may well stem from before then however--it is, on the other hand, clearly post-al-Wāḥidī. Reference to the work is simply by the catalogue reference "Berlin 3578".

Notes to Chapter III B.

1. See below, pp. 74-90.
2. See al-Nabḥās, al-Nāsikh wa'l-mansūkh fī'l-Qur'ān al-Karīm, pp. 14-88.
3. On these other works, see below p. 89.
4. Especially his al-Itqān but also the Tafsīr Jalālayn reference to which is made (very) occasionally.

## C: Introduction to the Exegetical Sources

As should be evident from the above discussion on previous scholarship on this topic, the loci of investigation as suggested in the works of Wansbrough (and Burton) are exegetical literature of three types: naskh, ahkam and early haggadic tafsir. The primary focus of the analysis will then be concerned with the following works:

### (a) Naskh

The naskh literature has received attention in Burton's The Collection of the Qur'ān and in Wansbrough's Quranic Studies; an important notion uncovered by Wansbrough is that the genre of literature entitled al-nāsikh wa'l-mansūkh envelops two different approaches to the subject.

The first, and the most popular approach, Wansbrough states, has as its aim "to demonstrate the presence of [abrogation] in the text of scripture".<sup>1</sup> He goes on to say:

They reflect a concerted effort to identify naskh as an originally Quranic phenomenon. Once seen to enjoy scriptural sanction, the principle of abrogation could in theory and with impunity be applied across the entire range of source materials for the formulation of Muslim law.<sup>2</sup>

Most of these works consist of little more than a listing of the abrogated verses, mentioning their abrogants and giving the inevitable ikhtilāf on each question. Various amounts of asbāb al-nuzūl material are adduced at the appropriate moments; to determine exactly why this is done and how it figures in the overall argument is, of course, the aim of the following analysis. The following works are those actually employed in the analysis:

- 1) al-Nahhās: al-Nāsikh wa'l-mansūkh fī'l-Qur'ān al-Karīm, Cairo:

Zakī Mubārak, 1938 (hereafter simply cited as al-Naḥḥās). Abū Ja'far Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Naḥḥās died in 338; he is the author of various exegetical works including Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān and I'rāb al-Qur'ān<sup>3</sup> along with a number of works in grammar and poetry.<sup>4</sup> His book on naskh is the basic work on the topic and is most definitely a serious attempt to deal with abrogation as a Quranic phenomenon. On al-Naḥḥās, see the introduction (pp. 7-24) to his Sharḥ abyāt Sībawayh; also, GAL I 132, S I 201; GAS I 48; QS 184, 196-198.

2) Hibat Allāh: Al-nāsikh wa'l-mansūkh, published innumerable times, especially on the margin of al-Wāḥidī, Kitāb asbāb al-nuzūl, e.g., Cairo, 1315. The edition used here is printed by itself, thus facilitating use, Cairo: Ḥalabī, 1960 (hereafter cited simply as Hibat Allāh). Abū'l-Qāsim Hibat Allāh ibn Salāma al-Baghdādī died in 410; this naskh work appears to be his only (extant) literary product. As a work it has proven extremely popular in the Muslim world; Sezgin lists sixty-five manuscripts of it; it is found in versified editions; it has, as mentioned above, been printed many times. As a work of serious scholarship, however, it deserves little more than Wansbrough's observations including the following: that Hibat Allāh's text is introduced by the anecdote concerning "ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and the preacher in Kufa who was banished from the mosque for not knowing his principles of abrogation. That level of discourse was hardly modified throughout the treatise..."<sup>5</sup> and that Hibat Allāh "found 239 instances in 71 suras [of abrogation] a consequence of massive and undifferentiated assertion, rather than subtle and reasoned analysis..."<sup>6</sup> The work can only be seen as an ouvrage de vulgarisation. On Hibat Allāh see GAL I 192, S I 335-336; GAS I 47-48; QS 184, 196-197.

3) Makkī: Al-Idāb li-nāsikh al-Qur'ān wa-mansūkhīhi, Riyāḍ: Kullīyat al-Sharī'a, 1976, ed. A. H. Farahāt (hereafter cited simply as Makkī). Muḥammad Makkī ibn abī Ṭālib al-Qaysī was born in 354 and died in 437; his works seem to be enjoying a revival in the Arab world at present, a number of his Quranic treatises having been edited and printed in the past five years. His naskh work is encyclopedic in approach, bringing together what would appear to be every conceivable opinion on each verse. Due to the (apparent) unavailability of the text in North America, only occasional reference is made to this work in the following analysis. On Makkī see GAL I 406, S I 718-719; GdQ III 214; Burton, The Collection of the Qur'ān, esp. p. 84 for Makkī's analysis of modes of mansūkh.

Two other works require mention if only to justify their non-employment. First, Brockelmann lists a Kitāb al-nāsikh wa'l-mansūkh under Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥazm, the famous Zāhirī scholar who died in 456.<sup>7</sup> This information was then repeated in the EI<sup>1</sup> article on Ibn Ḥazm.<sup>8</sup> The work has been printed several times on the margin of al-Suyūṭī, Tafsīr al-Jalālayn<sup>9</sup> and al-Fīrūzābādī, Tanwīr al-Miqbās.<sup>10</sup> However, even a cursory examination of this text reveals that it is not something one would expect to emanate from a person the calibre of Ibn Ḥazm (nor are the theories promulgated therein appropriate to Ibn Ḥazm--see Arnaldez: Grammaire et théologie chez Ibn Ḥazm de Cordoue, pp. 238-245 and Arnaldez, "Ibn Ḥazm" EI<sup>2</sup> where no mention is made of the work). Indeed, the printed text of the work attributes it to one Muḥammad ibn Ḥazm (otherwise unknown<sup>11</sup>) not Abū Muḥammad. The text itself is plainly post-Hibat Allāh, reducing the subtleties of the arguments even further, although



the introduction to the work is of a somewhat more serious character. Asbāb al-nuzūl material is reduced to a minimum and the work would be of limited appeal to this study even if it had come from the pen of the famous Ibn Ḥazm.

Second, Sezgin lists under Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Sulamī, the famous Ṣūfī who died in 412, al-Nāsikh wa'l-mansūkh fī'l-Qur'ān transmitted from Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī who died in 124.<sup>12</sup> In listing the manuscripts Sezgin has erred by confusing the Beyazit 445 manuscript of al-Baghdādī<sup>13</sup> with the Dār al-Kutub 1084 which probably is the al-Zuhrī/al-Sulamī work.<sup>14</sup> A second manuscript of the work exists, not listed by Sezgin, in Princeton Yehuda 228 which I have been able to examine. This manuscript also contains the Kitāb al-Tanzīl edited by S. Munajjid also attributed to al-Zuhrī/al-Sulamī. Examination of the Princeton manuscript reveals that the ascription of this work to al-Sulamī is, beyond a shadow of a doubt, quite incorrect although it is an error which seems to have been perpetrated by the copyist of the text on the title page and unquestioningly accepted from there by other people. Examination of the isnād of the text makes it clear that it is al-Sulamī, a companion of Muḥammad who died in the year 74, to whom reference is being made. Be that as it may, the value of the text itself remains debatable and the connection with al-Zuhrī questionable. It may, at best, be a text compiled of extracts from other works, each report having al-Zuhrī as its authority; this indeed seems to have been a common practice in the copying of "early" tafsīr works.<sup>15</sup> The fact that the text is very short (5 folios) and appears to add no additional information of an asbāb character means that leaving the text aside will not alter significantly the dimensions of this study. A full edition

and study of the text is required before it can be meaningfully employed, and it seems best to defer that project to another occasion.

The second approach to naskh has brought forth the comment from Wansbrough that such works are "less concerned with the specifically Quranic data and rather more with the principle of abrogation as a valid juridical principle."<sup>16</sup> That the first book of this approach, that of Abū 'Ubayd (d. 224), should be substantially earlier than that of al-Nabḥās further demonstrates the very much more basic issue that is being argued in this type of naskh work. Only two works of this type are known to me, being the following:

4) Abū 'Ubayd: Kitāb al-nāsikh wa'l-mansūkh, MS Ahmet III, 143. Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām died in the year 224; he is a famous Quranic exegete, the author of Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān as well as the author of books on ḥadith (Gharīb al-ḥadīth) and adab. I have, unfortunately, not been able to use this text; however, Wansbrough's description of the book<sup>17</sup> is sufficient to justify classifying this work differently from the previous works mentioned on naskh. The very fact that the chapters are arranged according to topic and not by their Quranic order is sufficient to prove that what is being argued is the juridical premise and not the Quranic occurrence of the phenomenon. On Abū 'Ubayd also see GAL I 107, S I 166-167 (where this work is not listed); GAS I 48; EI<sup>2</sup> I 157.

5) Al-Baghdādī: Kitāb al-nāsikh wa'l-mansūkh, MSS Berlin Petermann 555 and Beyazit 445 (hereafter cited as al-Baghdādī, Beyazit 445). Abū Maṣṣūr 'Abd al-Qāhir ibn Tāhir al-Baghdādī died in the year 429; he was a Shāfi'ī jurist and the author of the famous Al-farq bayn al-firaq and

Kitāb usūl al-dīn. His work on naskh is superficially like those of al-Nabhās and Hibat Allāh, that is, it follows Quranic order, although the treatment is divided into three chapters:

- (i) agreement on both abrogated and abrogant (f. 7a-45b)
- (ii) disagreement on whether abrogated (f. 46a-71b)
- (iii) agreement on abrogated but disagreement on abrogant (f. 71b-74a)

Most revealing is that while 59 verses of the Qur'ān serve as initiators of the discussions, al-Baghdādī himself arrives at the count of 75 abrogated verses.<sup>18</sup> The reason for this is plain: he treats each of the 59 verses as an introduction to the specific juridical problem raised by that verse; juridical problems which involve a progression of abrogated verses are treated comprehensively under the rubric of a single verse. It is, as Wansbrough has stated, the juridical premise that is being argued.<sup>19</sup> In many ways, al-Baghdādī's book is more a work of ahkām than naskh; naskh seems to serve only as the framework for juridical discussions. The amount of asbāb material adduced is not copious; that in itself may well be a significant fact. On al-Baghdādī see GAL I 385, S I 666-667; EI<sup>2</sup> I 909; QS 199; GdQ I 54 note 1: "eine von Hibat-Allah unabhängiges Buch" a classic under-statement!

Other early works do apparently exist on naskh, e.g., those ascribed to Qatāda (d. 118)<sup>20</sup> and al-Za'farān (d. 310)<sup>21</sup>, but their character remains unknown to me. Numerous later works also exist, of course. It is felt, however, that the four works listed above provide

both information and a range of approaches sufficient for the present purposes.

(b) Aḥkām

The selection of relevant aḥkām texts is, fortunately, somewhat more straightforward than was the case for naskh. The three classical works of al-Jaṣṣāṣ, Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Qurṭubī are without a doubt the landmarks of the genre; the work of Muqātil provides an important and methodologically early counterpart to those more sophisticated ikhtilāf-laden treatises. All the works adduce asbāb material although in varying degrees; to discover why they do so and how it adds to the halakhic discussion at hand is, of course, the aim of the analysis. The following four works are being employed.

- 1) Muqātil: Tafsīr khams mi'a āya min al-Qur'ān, British Library OR 6333 (dated 792) (hereafter cited as Muqātil, Khams mi'a āya). Abū'l-Ḥasan Muqātil ibn Sulaymān al-Balkhī died in 150. He has received extensive attention in recent scholarship, for the most part quite appreciative, although Sezgin's characterization is somewhat more representative of the general medieval Muslim evaluation of the man ("er bei seinen Erklärungen seiner Phantasie freien Lauf liess"<sup>22</sup>).

Three works of Muqātil are extant:

Al-Ashbāh wa'l-nazā'ir (Cairo: al-Hay'at al-Miṣriya al-ʿāma lil-Kitāb, 1975)

Tafsīr al-Qur'ān (on which see below)

Tafsīr khams mi'a āya in the British Library unicum.

Wansbrough has given an extensive treatment of Khams mi'a āya, and it would

be redundant to repeat that here;<sup>23</sup> it is to be noted that the attribution of the tafsīr and Khams mi'a āya to the same author gains strength through an examination of the asbāb material in each book--they have (virtually always) identical anecdotes.<sup>24</sup> What is different, and this is what is significant and what makes the work so important for this analysis, is the organizational principle of the text.<sup>25</sup> On Muqātil and his works see GAS I 36-37; Goldziher, Richtungen, pp. 58-60 (who had not seen a copy of the Tafsīr); Abbott, SALP II on ashbāh/wujūh wa nazā'ir work; also Nwyia, Exégèse Coranique, pp. 25-116 on the same book and his Tafsīr (Wansbrough had not seen Nwyia's book when writing QS). M. M. al-Sawwaf, "Muqātil ibn Sulayman, an early Zaidī theologian", Oxford Ph.D., 1968.

2) al-Jassās: Ahkām al-Qur'ān, Istanbul, 1335-1338 in 3 volumes, ed. Kilisli Rif'at (hereafter cited simply as al-Jassās). Abū Bakr Ahmad Alī al-Jassās was born in 305 and died in 370; he was a Ḥanifī jurist, spending most of his life in Baghdad. His extant works all deal with fiqh and ḥadīth. His ahkām work treats the juridical problems brought up by individual Quranic verses, treated in their Quranic order. Only verses relevant to the halakha are dealt with. On al-Jassās see GAL S I 335; GAS I 444-445; EI<sup>2</sup> II 486; QS 185-186, 188. Of some interest also is Saeedullah, "Life and works of Abū Bakr al-Rāzī al-Jassās", Islamic Studies, 16(1977) 131-141.

3) Ibn al-ʿArabī: Ahkām al-Qur'ān. Two editions are available, Cairo, 1331 in two volumes and a second one, vastly superior and used here, Cairo: Ḥalabī, 2nd ed. 1967 (1st ed. 1959) in four volumes (paged consecutively) (hereafter simply cited as Ibn al-ʿArabī). Abū Bakr

Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allāh Ibn al-'Arabī al-Ma'āfirī was born in Spain in 468, studied in Baghdad and Cairo then returning to Seville in 493, dying there in the year 543; he was a Mālikī by legal persuasion. The author of some fifteen works,<sup>26</sup> he appears to have devoted himself to the study of law in the Qur'ān and ḥadīth. His most famous work is his commentary on al-Saḥīḥ of al-Tirmidhī. His ahkām text is like that of al-Jassās, treating each halakhically-relevant verse in its Quranic order, although Ibn al-'Arabī's presentation and argumentation follow a more systematic approach than that of al-Jassās. On Ibn al-'Arabī see GAL I 525, S I 632-633, 732-733; EI<sup>2</sup> III 707; QS 184-190.

4) Al-Qurṭubī : al-Jāmi' li-Ahkām al-Qur'ān, Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Misriya, 1354/1935 - 1367/1948 reprinted Cairo, 1387 in 20 volumes. Shams al-Dīn Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Abū Bakr al-Qurṭubī al-Andalusī died in 671; he lived in Upper Egypt and was a Mālikī jurist. Nine of his works are mentioned by Brockelmann; all of them deal with the religious sciences, i.e., Qur'ān, ḥadīth, polemic and theology. His ahkām work, undoubtedly his magnum opus, is a truly magisterial treatment of the topic. His tendency to adduce every possible sabab for a verse as well as his extensive halakhic discussions make his work doubly important for the analysis here. The work is "midrashic" in style,<sup>27</sup> giving some sort of interpretation for every verse, even when there is no clear halakhic issue to debate. Al-Qurṭubī clearly considers the moral teachings of the entire Qur'ān, even those passages traditionally classed as akhbār, to be of halakhic importance. On al-Qurṭubī, see also GAL I 415-416, S I 737; GdQ II 177. Reference to his work is hereafter simply cited as al-Qurṭubī.

One other work would have been of great interest were it available--al-Ṭabarī, Kitāb al-Risāla min laṭīf al-qawl fī'l-bayān 'an uṣūl al-aḥkām. This work is quoted a number of times in al-Ṭabarī's tafsīr<sup>28</sup> although I can hardly agree with Sezgin<sup>29</sup> that the extended section in the tafsīr (vol. II, 207-209) is an actual full extract from that work. In several cases, however, these brief extracts as found in the tafsīr prove central to the analysis below, and attention will be drawn to them at each appropriate point.

(c) Haggadic Tafsīr

It is Wansbrough's claim, as noted above in the treatment of "Previous Scholarship",<sup>30</sup> that asbāb al-nuzūl are "intrusive" within haggadic exegesis because they are essentially halakhic in purpose. By examining the naskh and aḥkām works, the purpose to which asbāb al-nuzūl are put will be determined for the halakhic sphere; it remains then to examine the asbāb al-nuzūl within their haggadic context, to see if their frequent inclusion in that genre is indeed intrusive.

A large number of early haggadic-type tafsīrs appears to be available, thanks to the bibliographical work of Sezgin. However, first impressions are often misleading. Sezgin is trying to argue the point in GAS (parallel to Abbott in SALP) of the existence of early tafsīr work and as well, of their written reliable transmission, a point which, it would seem, is conceived to have a decidedly theological value to it. Various factors in his approach make this a not very subtle argument. Single works are found ascribed to more than one person, providing a rather artificial proliferation of early works; e.g.,

Gharīb al-Qur'ān Atif Efendi 2815/8

- 1) Ibn 'Abbās (GAS I 27)
- 2) 'Aṭā' ibn Abī Rabāḥ (GAS I 31)
- 3) Abū Ja'far ibn Ayyūb (GAS I 39)

This tendency is also very prominent in the qirā'āt works.<sup>31</sup>

Another trend is the arbitrary selection of a person within an isnād of a work as the author of the work. Most flagrant in this respect is the Tafsīr of al-Kalbī<sup>32</sup> but also found in the case of Abū Muḥammad Mūsā al-Thaqafī<sup>33</sup> who died in 190, whose Tafsīr had previously<sup>34</sup> been ascribed to Bakr ibn Sahl al-Dimyātī who died in 289.<sup>35</sup> Both names are found in the isnād of the work, which is repeated often throughout the work, but it is to be noted that on numerous occasions the isnād stops at al-Dimyātī and not at al-Thaqafī.<sup>36</sup> Selection of al-Thaqafī as the "author" of the work is arbitrary, even by the internal evidence of the text.

A further problem which is of more concern here involves texts which are ascribed to early authorities but which appear to be extracts from later books. Three such works are available to me:

- 1) Sufyān al-Thawrī: Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, Rampur, 1965 (hereafter simply cited as Sufyān al-Thawrī); Sufyān died in 161. On him see GAS I 518-519; editor's introduction to the Tafsīr; QS 137-138.
- 2) Mujāhid ibn Jabr: Tafsīr Mujāhid, MS Cairo, Dār al-Kutub tafsīr 1074; printed Qatar, 1976 (the latter cited hereafter simply as Mujāhid). Mujāhid died in 104. Involved here is arbitrary ascription also,



for several isnāds within the work terminate at ʿAbd Allāh ibn Abī Najīb (d. 131) rather than Mujāhid although note that Sezgin is not responsible for his ascription since the MS is entitled Tafsīr Mujāhid. On Mujāhid see GAS I 29 and the editor's introduction to his Tafsīr; QS 139.

3) ʿAbd al-Razzāq: Tafsīr, MS Cairo, Dār al-Kutub, tafsīr 242 (hereafter simply cited as ʿAbd al-Razzāq). ʿAbd al-Razzāq died in 211. He is thus quite late but still is typical of this type of tafsīr. On him see GAS I 99.

A work I have not seen but that is likely to be of the same type is that of ʿAṭāʾ al-Khurasānī<sup>37</sup> who died in 135.

The factor which unites all these works is that they are of a fragmentary nature and that they are all prominent authorities for later writers, especially al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī. The suspicion that the works are extracts compiled from those later works is strengthened by the editor's work in the texts of Sufyān and Mujāhid in collating these sources. That in itself does not invalidate these works as being early sources, but it is to be remembered that if they are extracts from later works, these extracts do not necessarily represent the entire thought of the earlier authority; Wansbrough's dictum is valuable: "It will be useful to remember that no writer merely transmits, and that even a compilation reveals principles both of selection and arrangement."<sup>38</sup>

An examination of the asbāb al-nuzūl material given in those works of this type which are available to me is made in the following analysis; the co-incidence involved in the reports with the information cited from al-Ṭabarī (in most cases) only demonstrates the lack of

independent value of the works themselves however.

4) The matter of the tafsīr of al-Kalbī is, as suggested above, quite a different affair. Sezgin and Wansbrough<sup>39</sup> have employed only manuscript sources in their description of the tafsīr. Sezgin, it is to be noted, manages to list 50 such manuscripts, over 90 percent of which come from the 11th or 12th centuries. Both authors have ignored the existence of printed editions; indeed, Sezgin seems to have assumed that the manuscripts and the editions are different for, in talking of the Tafsīr of Ibn ʿAbbās,<sup>40</sup> he states:

Die erhaltenen, Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās betitelten Werke sind zum grossen Teil die Bearbeitung von M. b. as-Sāʿib al-Kalbī, die durch die Überlieferung von ʿA. b. A. Talha [sic]<sup>41</sup> auf ʿAl. b. al-ʿAbbās...und z. T. die Sammlung von M. b. Yaʿqūb al-Fīrūzābādī (st. 817/1415)...ud T. Tanwīr al-miqbās min tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās, gedr. Bulaq 1863, 1866, 1873, 1885, Kairo 1302, 1316, 1332, 1937, 1960.

However, Brockelmann<sup>42</sup>, Ritter<sup>43</sup> and Levi Della Vida,<sup>44</sup> all of whom Sezgin quotes, make it clear that both the manuscripts and the printed editions are the same, although they do not agree upon the person to whom to ascribe the text. Levi Della Vida was insistent, however, that, contrary to Schwally,<sup>45</sup> this work should not be attributed to al-Kalbī because it showed marked differences (especially a reduction in quantity) from excerpts found in other works which were ascribed to al-Kalbī. While isolated instances of discrepancy such as that quoted by Levi Della Vida are not very impressive evidence of the validity of this argument, the evidence can in fact be multiplied many times over through the comparison of quotes of al-Kalbī found in al-Wāḥidī's works<sup>46</sup>

and in al-Thaʿlabī.<sup>47</sup> It seems a justified conclusion when numerous other comparisons are done (some such comparisons will be found in the following analysis) to declare that this work is not identical with what we have traditionally ascribed to al-Kalbī.

That the text may in fact be an edition of the tafsīr of al-Kalbī, and this supports Wansbrough's conclusion regarding the Tafsīr, i.e., that it shows evidence of extensive editorial intervention,<sup>48</sup> is suggested by two additional pieces of evidence:

- (a) that the quotations attributed to al-Kalbī have (generally) the same theme as those found in the ascribed text; examples will be found in the following analysis;
- (b) that al-Wāḍiḥ fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān by al-Dīnawarī<sup>49</sup> is in fact identical to the text ascribed to al-Kalbī with the addition of the following preface:

Abū Muḥammad al-Dīnawarī, the author of this "al-Wāḍiḥ" which he composed and took from the sources and shortened ...[said] and everything that is difficult for you in this abbreviated Tafsīr, search for in that Tafsīr of al-Kalbī, transmitted by Yūsuf ibn Bilāl.<sup>50</sup>

The fact that this text is identical with that ascribed to al-Kalbī but at the same time al-Dīnawarī makes reference to another tafsīr of al-Kalbī as a source, suggests that here in fact may be the origin of the "edition" of the tafsīr of al-Kalbī.

Reference is made in the following analysis to the printed edition of the tafsīr, al-Fīrūzābādī, Tanwīr al-Miqbās min tafsīr ibn ʿAbbās, Cairo, 1957. Occasional reference has also been made to the

British Library OR 9277 catalogued under Ibn ʿAbbās, and al-Dīnawarī, Al-Wāḍiḥ, Leiden MS 1651. This work is always quoted as "al-Kalbī" although the above considerations should make it clear that "al-Dīnawarī" would actually be more accurate.<sup>51</sup> A full description of the work is found in Wansbrough;<sup>52</sup> the most notable features of the text are the lack of connectives between scripture and text and the very fast pace at which the commentary moves, often glossing only two or three words at a time. Without undue exaggeration, the tafsīr could be called an Arabic Targum to the Qurʾān; that it fulfilled the same liturgical function as the Aramaic Targums is suggested by Wansbrough and is a most cogent theory.<sup>53</sup> The lack of asbāb material found by Wansbrough<sup>54</sup> is, in my opinion, to be attributed to the fact that focus of attention in that study was Sūra 12 where few opportunities according to the traditional interpretations would present themselves to cite such anecdotes. In Sūra 2 as will be seen, a more generous quantity of material is found.

5) The person of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān has been treated above while dealing with his Khams miʿa āya; here it remains only to state that his Tafsīr is used here from the Istanbul manuscript Ahmet III, 74, dating from the year 886. The commentary itself has been fully described by Wansbrough<sup>55</sup> and to some extent by Nwyia.<sup>56</sup> The purely haggadic quality of the work (while recognizing that form is as important a judge of "haggadic-ness" as content, compare above with regards to his Khams miʿa āya) makes the commentary central to the following investigation.

6) The work of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310) Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl al-Qurʾān should need no introduction or justifica-

tion for its choice. The comprehensive nature of the work, the evidence of the workings of a very subtle mind and its early date make it the focal point of the following discussion. The edition of Shākir, Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1955-1969 in 16 volumes is used up to Sūra 14/27; thereafter wherever reference is required, the 30 volume edition of Cairo: 1321 is used.

7) Finally, a tafsīr work by al-Wāḥidī (d. 468) has been employed in order to see his own exegetical procedure, thus enabling a comparison to be made with the ideas he sets forth in Asbāb nuzūl al-Qur'ān. The text is Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Wajīz (hereafter cited as al-Wāḥidī, Wajīz) used here as printed on the margin of al-Nawawī, Marāḥ Labīd, Cairo, 1305 with reference also to the British Library manuscript OR 9485. In style the work is extremely reminiscent of that ascribed to al-Kalbī.<sup>57</sup>

The possibility of performing this same type of comparison for al-Suyūṭī was entertained, but it was decided that little would be added; as was pointed out in Chapter I, al-Suyūṭī makes his methodological presuppositions and his sources quite clear in his asbāb al-nuzūl text. His dependence on al-Wāḥidī makes it apparent that the latter's is, in essence, a far more important work.

A number of other early works was surveyed, such as Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 373 or 383 or 393), Tafsīr al-Qur'ān<sup>58</sup> and al-Māturīdī (d. 333), Ta'wīlāt ahl al-Sunna<sup>59</sup> but were found to add little extra to the survey; masoretic works such as Abu 'Ubayda (d. 210), Majāz al-Qur'ān or al-Farrā' (d. 207), Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān, as noted by Wansbrough,<sup>60</sup> contain virtually no asbāb material. Later, more "classical" works of exegesis

such as those of al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538), al-Rāzī (d. 606) or al-Bayḍawī (d. 716) are, of course, beyond purview here due to their amalgamation of all the various types of exegesis into one new style.

The sources are cited according to the editions listed above; in order to facilitate cross-reference to other editions, reference is always to the author's discussion of the verse in question unless otherwise stated. Finally, if one of the above sources listed as a primary source for the analysis is not cited in the discussion of any given verse, then it may be presumed that the author gives no asbāb material for the verse in question.

## Notes to Chapter III C.

1. QS 196.
2. QS 197.
3. Apparently two different works, although cf., GAS I 48.
4. See GAS II 47, 48, 50.
5. QS 196.
6. QS 197; cf., GdQ I 53: "sehr grosse Autorität...den meisten spätern Werken...als Quelle und Muster diene."!
7. See GAL I 400, S I 696.
8. EI<sup>1</sup> II 385 by van Arendonk; see R. Blachère, Introduction au Coran, p. 242, n. 346.
9. E.g., Cairo: Ḥalabī, 1924.
10. On which see below, re: al-Kalbī.
11. Cf. however, M. Zayd, al-Naskh fī'l-Qur'ān al-Karīm, p. 327, for a possible identification.
12. See GAS I 671-674 re: al-Sulamī; I 280-283 re: al-Zuhrī.
13. See below, pp. 78-79.
14. See Fihrist makḥṭūṭāt al-muṣawwara of the Ma'had Ihyā' al-Makḥṭūṭāt al-'Arabīya, I 48, probably the source through which Sezgin's confusion arose since the works are listed there consecutively; note that Sezgin has the correct number of folios listed, i.e., 16 in the Dar al-Kutub MS, not the 78 of the Beyazit; cf., QS 198-199.
15. See below pp. 83-85; on the text as a whole see M. Zayd, al-Naskh fī'l-Qur'ān al-Karīm, pp. 296 ff.
16. QS 198.
17. QS 193-194, 198.
18. See Beyazit 445, f. 74a; note that in the introduction the number 57 is cited although the text clearly has a total of 59 subdivisions.
19. See QS 199; also see M. Zayd, al-Naskh fī'l-Qur'ān al-Karīm, pp. 368-375 for a description and outline of the text.

20. GAS I 31.
21. GAS I 42; also see M. Zayd, al-Naskh fī'l-Qur'ān al-Karīm, for extensive treatment of other texts also.
22. GAS I 37.
23. QS 163-165 and 170-174.
24. See QS 164 and M. M. al-Sawwaf, "Muqātil ibn Sulayman, an early Zaidī theologian", Oxford Ph.D. thesis, 1968, p. 127, for this same point.
25. See QS 173 for a detailed outline of the contents and arrangement of the text.
26. See the introduction to the Ḥalabi edition of Abkām.
27. See QS 201, note 4.
28. See al-Ṭabarī, Jāmi' al-Bayān II 207, 535, 547, IV 364, 414, V 514.
29. GAS I 328, no. 11.
30. See above pp. 66-67.
31. GAS I 6-18.
32. On which see below, pp. 86-88.
33. GAS I 39.
34. E.g., O. Spies, "Die Bibliotheken des Hidschas" ZDMG 90(1936) 103.
35. GAS I 161.
36. See E. Griffini, "I manoscritti subarabici di Milano", RSO II (1908-9) 7-13.
37. In one Zāhiriya manuscript only, see GAS I 33; on Ahmet III manuscript see QS 186.
38. QS 120; also see 139-140; cf. his opinion of the Sufyān tafsīr, QS 138.
39. GAS I 34-35; QS 130-137.



40. GAS I 27.
41. All the isnāds are uniform in giving al-Kalbī - Abū Ṣāliḥ - Ibn ʿAbbās, see e.g., H. Ritter, "Ayasofya Kütüphanesinde tefsir", Türkiyat Mecmuası, VII-VIII (1945) 7 (Aya Sofia 114, 155, 116, 118); Bankipore Catalogue XVIII part 2, pp. 1-2 (no. 1322).
42. GAL I 190, S I 331 under Ibn ʿAbbās.
43. "Ayasofya Kütüphanesinde tefsir", Türkiyat Mecmuası, VII-VIII (1945) 6-7.
44. "Appunti e quesiti di storia letteraria araba: al-Kalbī e gli scismi Christiani", RSO 13(1932) 327-331.
45. GdQ II 171 - he too had seen only the manuscripts and not the printed edition.
46. I.e., Kitāb asbāb nuzūl al-Qur'ān; Kitāb al-wajīz fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān; Al-Wasiṭ bayan al-maqbūd wa'l-basīṭ; Al-basīṭ.
47. Al-Kashf wa'l-bayān, British Library, Add. 19926 (Vol. I), OR 9060 (Vol. III).
48. QS 132-133, a conclusion reached on the basis of quite different considerations from those given here.
49. See GAS I 42; QS 146 describes the text as "a nearly verbatim reproduction of Kalbī's commentary." Cf. Leiden MS 1651.
50. Following this comes the isnād of al-Dīnawarī's work which is identical to that found in the texts ascribed to al-Kalbī. See f. 1b, Leiden MS 1641 and Leiden MS Catalogue IV 16.
51. I presented a summation of the results of my investigation into al-Kalbī's tafsīr at the AAR meeting, New York 1979; an abstract of that paper is found in Abstracts: American Academy of Religion 1979, pp. 148-149.
52. QS 130-137, 140-146.
53. QS 146.
54. QS 141-142.
55. QS 122-136, 140-146.
56. Exégèse Coranique et Langage Mystique, pp. 61-108.

57. Other tafsīr works of al-Wāḥidī still exist also: al-Wasīṭ bayn al-maqbūḍ wa'l-basīṭ (Berlin MS, Sprenger 415) and al-Basīṭ (Nur Othmaniye 236-240, Cairo Dār al-Kutub, tafsīr 53); both of these are more expansive than al-Wajīz. The brevity of the latter however makes it advantageous for comparative purposes, for the fairly safe assertion can be made that in al-Wajīz al-Wāḥidī will present his most favoured interpretation for any given verse and leave the other possibilities to his larger works. Thus it will be easy to see how al-Wāḥidī ranks the information in Asbāb nuzūl al-Qur'ān for example.
58. British Library OR 9566.
59. Halet Efendi 22; Sūras 1 and 2 are available in a printed edition, Cairo: 1972.
60. QS 202-208.

## D: The Analysis of Sūra 2

2/1-2

Alif-lām-mīm

This [That] is the book in which  
there is no doubt (and is )  
a guidance to those who fear God.

Al-Wāḥidī, al-Suyūṭī, Berlin 3578, Sufyān al-Thawrī and al-Ṭabarī<sup>1</sup>  
all reproduce a report on the authority of Mujāhid, in whose tafsīr  
the report is also found,<sup>2</sup> which states that the first four verses<sup>3</sup>  
of sūra 2 were revealed concerning (nazalat fī) the believers, (mu'-  
minūn), the next two about the unbelievers (kāfirūn)<sup>4</sup> and the 13 verses  
after that about the hypocrites (munāfiqūn).<sup>5</sup>

The report is minimal with no narrative element and it is only  
when other reports are compared that the significance and importance  
of these apparently bald statements can be ascertained. Ibn Iṣḥāq  
states that the first 100 verses of the sūra were revealed concerning  
(nazala ṣaḍr sūrat al-baqara...fī) the Jewish rabbis and the hypocrites  
of Aws and Khazraj;<sup>6</sup> at verse 7, he makes it clear that, specifically,  
the first seven verses were revealed concerning the Jews.<sup>7</sup> Al-Ṭabarī  
also produces a similar explanation, framed in terms of "who was intended  
[a'yān] by the first two verses of the sūra" with the possibility  
presented that it is "the people of the book" who are meant, although  
no reports are adduced to support the point.<sup>8</sup> Muqātil too brings forth  
a similar report but in a more narrative form.<sup>9</sup> When Muḥammad called  
the Jews Ka'b ibn Ashraf and Ka'b ibn Usayd to Islam, they said "God  
has not revealed a book after Moses", to which God revealed (fa-anzala)  
"dhālika 'l-kitāb", that is, this book in which the Jews disbelieve,  
"lā rayb fīhi", that is, no doubt in it that it comes from God and he has  
revealed it to Muḥammad. Muqātil's use of the polemical motif of

abrogation of former scriptures makes the context of the verse revolve around Jewish disputation but makes the reference of the verse to the Qur'ān, an interpretation which al-Ṭabarī also invokes.<sup>10</sup> Ibn Ishāq however seems to have a different intention in his Jewish context; he is the only exegete consulted who does not gloss dhālika l'-kitāb as hādhā'l-kitāb or hādhā'l-Qur'ān<sup>11</sup>--he leaves the phrase as self-explanatory, seemingly taking the reference as being to the Torah (and perhaps the Gospels). That this is his understanding is confirmed by his glossing the phrase "a guidance to those who fear God", once again, not as the Qur'ān but as "those who fear God's punishment for abandoning the guidance they recognize...",<sup>12</sup> that is, abandoning the covenant, a common polemical charge of the Sīra against the Jews.<sup>13</sup> The whole underlying notion of the sabab is the interpretation of dhālika l'-kitāb: is it "that book" and thus perhaps the Torah<sup>14</sup> or is it "this book" and thus the Qur'ān? Solution to the exegetical problem was put within the framework of various identifications of the context in the form of asbāb.

## Notes to 2/1-2

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 19; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 9; Berlin 3578, f. 5a; Sufyān al-Thawrī, p. 41; al-Ṭabarī I 239-240, reports 278-280; Also al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 27-28.
2. Mujāhid, p. 69.
3. Only Berlin 3578 makes reference to the fact that this is five verses according to the Kufan tradition of verse numbering, the major tradition followed today (but not in Flügel numbering); see A. Spitaler, Die Verszählung des Koran nach islamischer Überlieferung, p. 32.
4. See below ad 2/6-7.
5. See below ad 2/8.
6. Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 530.
7. Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 531; see below ad 2/6-7.
8. Al-Ṭabarī I 238.
9. Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 3b; also see Khams mi'a āya, f. 2a for the same basic meaning of the verses although no sabab is adduced. Muqātil also cites a tradition that systematizes the verses much like Mujāhid's report: first 2 (sic) verses re: the asbāb and the muhājirūn; the next 2 re: the Arab mushrikūn; the next 13 re: the munāfiqūn of the ahl al-tawrāt (Tafsīr, f. 5a lines 5-7). This analysis however neither makes a lot of sense nor does it agree with Muqātil's actual glossing of the verses in question. It may well be an editorial intrusion of a variation of the Mujāhid tradition.
10. Al-Ṭabarī I 238.
11. This is the common majāz/taqdīr of the phrase: see e.g., Abū 'Ubayda, Majāz al-Qur'ān I 28-29; see also QS 75.
12. Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 530.
13. See SM 11-18.
14. The solution that "that book" is meant "literally" and refers to the celestial tablet would seem to be a later notion.

2/6-7      Indeed, for those who disbelieve,  
               it is the same to them whether  
               you warn them or you do not warn them.  
               They will not believe.  
               God has sealed their hearts and  
               their hearing and on their eyes is a veil.  
               Theirs is a great penalty.

The full dimensions of some of the problems implicit in verses 1 and 2 treated above become more obvious in the asbāb of these verses. The majority report given above suggested that the first five (4) verses were revealed about the believers, the next two about the disbelievers. It is, then, the matter of the identity of those "disbelievers" in verse 6 which becomes the center of the dispute in the asbāb for the verse. Those exegetes who had identified the party concerned in verses one through five as the Jews, of course, faced little problem: the phrase alladhīna kafarū was simply exegetically equated with al-Yahūd; Ibn Ishāq and one report in Muqātil take this approach.<sup>1</sup>

Those however who followed Mujāhid's report about the verses were faced with a choice: to take alladhīna kafarū in its common meaning of the pagan disbelievers or once again to take the reference as the Jews.

The notion that the Jews are those referred to is widespread and finds its place in brief identification - asbāb. Exegetes cite either one of two reports, one from al-Kalbī where the gloss is simply ya'nī al-Yahūd,<sup>2</sup> the other (taken out of the context) from Ibn Ishāq that the verses were revealed about the Jews.<sup>3</sup> Various sources attempt to identify the protagonists by name: Ḥuyayy ibn Akḥṭab and Ka'b ibn Ashraf are two common names adduced, both clearly representing Jewish "perfidy" in Medina at its worst within the polemical context of sīra compositions.<sup>4</sup> Only al-'Irāqī provides a full narrative of the confrontation here:

[The Jews] said: "Oh Muhammad! We have heard that there was revealed to you alif-lām-mīm and this indicates that the remaining period of your religion is 71 years." 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb [said]: "Where did you get that from?" Huyayy said: "Because alif is one, lām 30, mīm 40." Then ['Umar] recited to them "Alif-lām-mīm-sād" and "Alif-lām-mīm-ra'" and they said: "This is greater than the first; you are confusing us. We do not know whether it will last a long or a short time"...So there was revealed the saying of God...[2/6-7]...<sup>5</sup>

The basic narrative of this sabab is familiar from the Sīra of Ibn Ishāq although there the verse which follows from the narrative is not Q. 2/6-7. Ibn Ishāq is, in fact, unsure about the matter; one report has it that the response to the Jews was Q. 3/7: "In it are muhkam verses, they are the mother of the book, and others are mutashābih verses". Obviously enough the story is a sabab designed to back up the interpretation of the mutashābihāt as the mysterious letters. On the other hand, Ibn Ishāq has other reports which connect 3/7 with other incidents.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Muqātil adduces a report similar to that of al-'Irāqī, and connects it inter alia with 3/7, but its basic peg is 2/5 not 2/6-7.<sup>7</sup> The motif of Jewish gematria in disputation obviously proved flexible in application.

The opposing notion that the pagans are those referred to as alladhīna kafarū comes in several variations, ranging from a general connection to those killed at the Battle of Badr,<sup>8</sup> to specific names of Meccan pagans who were killed at Badr--Abū Jahl and five members of his family<sup>9</sup> or 'Utba, Shayba and al-Walīd.<sup>10</sup>

The choice between these two basic possibilities of identification of alladhīna kafarū produced some extensive arguments in al-Ṭabarī to justify his choice of the Jewish focus of the verse; he admits that his

decision is a matter of choice [ikhtiyār] for which he tries to produce a reason [‘ilāl] by showing the total applicability of the verse to the Jewish situation;<sup>11</sup> his final conclusion tries to suggest a general rule:

If some of the statements [in the paragraph] are pertinent to the rest [of the paragraph] except that a "clear indication" brings about a deviation in some of that [relationship] from how [the paragraph] began meaning-wise, its departure from [that] will become known thereby.<sup>12</sup>

It is such considerations of "clear indications" that al-Ṭabarī often emphasizes and to which he often appeals, although the subjective aspect involved in determining what precisely a "clear indication" is should be quite apparent.

Al-Qurṭubī's manner of resolving the conflict is quite different: the verse is taken to be general (‘āmma) in application "while its meaning specifically (khusūs) refers to those for whom the notion of the punishment turns out to be true and is anticipated by the knowledge of God".<sup>13</sup> This notion, al-Qurṭubī claims, enters implicitly into the verse.

Finally, note must be taken of al-Ṭabarī's introduction to his whole discussion: "the ahl al-ta'wīl disagree concerning who is intended (‘uniya) by this verse and about whom it is revealed (fī man nazalat)."<sup>14</sup> In this verse al-Ṭabarī does not seem to differentiate between these two expressions.



## Notes to 2/6-7

1. Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 531; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 5a line 7.
2. Al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, p. 19; Berlin 3578, f. 5a has two reports: al-Kalbī, al-yahūd; Ibn Sā'ib, Ibn Akhtab and his group; this is strange since al-Kalbī is Ibn Sā'ib!
3. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 9 report from al-Ṭabarī I 251.
4. Al-Kalbī, p. 3; al-Qurṭubī I 184; al-ʿIrāqī, f. 1b who lists a total of eight names.
5. Al-ʿIrāqī, f. 1b; also see SM 44.
6. Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 545-547; see SM 16; also see QS 64, on the whole theme of gematria.
7. Muqātil, Tafsīr, ff. 4a-5a.
8. Al-Qurṭubī I 184; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 9; al-Ṭabarī I 252 all from Rabīʿ ibn Anas; Berlin 3578, f. 5a from Abū'l-ʿAlīya.
9. Al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, p. 19, Wajīz, p. 4; Berlin 3578, f. 5a-both authors quote from al-Daḥḥāk; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 5a undifferentiated from following group. See Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 710-711.
10. Al-Kalbī, p. 3; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 5a undifferentiated from previous group. See Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 708 for these names.
11. Al-Ṭabarī I 253-254.
12. Al-Ṭabarī I 254.
13. Al-Qurṭubī I 184.
14. Al-Ṭabarī I 251.

2/8

Among the people some say:  
 "We believe in God and in the last day"  
 but they do not believe.

Al-Ṭabarī reports about this verse that "all the ahl al-ta'wīl agree this verse was revealed concerning a group of the ahl al-nifāq". Such agreement is of course not surprising, given the fact that the verse is conceived of as giving the basic definition of hypocrisy, that is, saying something that one does not really believe. Al-Ṭabarī then goes on to list eight reports all of which basically say ya'nī al-munāfiqīn, including three versions of the basic report given by Mujāhid and cited above at verse 1-2.<sup>1</sup> However, al-Ṭabarī's positive statement glosses over an underlying matter of concern to some exegetes: exactly which hypocrites? Who exactly are the "some who say" of the verse? Expression of concern about this point is found in some asbāb reports although neither al-Wāḥidī nor al-Suyūṭī report anything on the matter, deferring discussion until verse 14. Berlin 3578 reproduces one report on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās that this was revealed concerning the hypocrites from among the Jews.<sup>2</sup> Given the central role of the pagans/hypocrites in the Sīra the transmission of this report may seem somewhat surprising. But comparison with further sources reveals that the distinction between Medinan Jews and pagans/hypocrites is flexible. Muqātil reports that this verse was revealed about the hypocrites from among the ahl al-kitāb al-yahūd among whom were 'Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy ibn Salūl, Jidd ibn Qays, al-Ḥārith ibn 'Amr, Mu'attib ibn Qushayr and 'Amr ibn Zayd;<sup>3</sup> three of these people along with a certain Bishr are also cited by al-'Irāqī as being the group talked about in this verse.<sup>4</sup> But the question of their Jewish/pagan status is made variable by Ibn Ishāq who lists these people as members of the Khazraj tribe in Medina.<sup>5</sup> Such confusion allows a

person such as Guillaume to assert in his translation of Ibn Ishāq:

"It is by no means certain that these men were Jews. The previous section [i.e., where the people Muqātil cites are mentioned] almost certainly proves that they were not; however they may well have been half converted to Judaism like so many of the inhabitants of Medina."<sup>6</sup>

While such a point is not impossible within the traditional interpretation of Islam, the flexibility of the categories of Jewish and pagan opposition to Islam has already been well established and this would seem to be just another instance of that flexibility.<sup>7</sup>

One other note in Berlin 3578 is of great interest for its technical terminology: a report is given from Ibn Mas'ūd that the verse is mutlaq<sup>an</sup>--unrestricted in application, a term probably equivalent to 'āmm in most cases although perhaps of special applicability in contexts of not overtly halakhic context.<sup>8</sup>

## Notes to 2/8

1. Al-Tabarī I 268-270; also al-Qurṭubī I 192; Ibn al-ʿArabi I 11 (murād bi); al-Wāḥidī, Wajīz, p. 4.
2. Berlin 3578, f. 5a; the report follows verse 14 for perhaps significant reasons when compared to al-Wāḥidī and al-Suyūṭī.
3. Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 5a.
4. Al-ʿIrāqī, f. 1b.
5. Sīra I 526; note that Ibn Ishāq also is specific in his glossing of "some who say" in the more traditional "the hypocrites of Aws and Khazraj".
6. Guillaume, The Life of Muhammad, p. 246 note 4.
7. See e.g., G. Vajda, "Juifs et Musulmans selon le ḥadīth", JA, CCXXIX (1937) 57-127 and QS 70-73, 183.
8. Berlin 3578, f. 5a; on ʿāmm, khāṣṣ see QS 169, 178 and cf. 185; the wording may be distinctive to this manuscript.

2/11

When it is said to them:

"Do not cause corruption on the earth!"

They say: "Rather, we are acting properly."

Only Berlin 3578 among the asbāb texts cites possible "occasions of revelation" for this verse, the matter for the other exegetes presumably being taken care of by Mujāhid's report adduced at verse 1-2. The first report in Berlin 3578 is simply from Mujāhid and states that the reference (of "to them") is to the hypocrites; this is no more than making explicit what has come before.<sup>1</sup> A second report, credited to (Salmān) al-Fārisī, states that the verse is concerned with "those who will exist", presumably at the end of the world.<sup>2</sup> This interpretation is perhaps confirmed by al-Ṭabarī where a report is also found from al-Fārisī; about this verse, Salmān said: "These (people) have not yet arrived".<sup>3</sup> The impact of this interpretation, like that in Berlin 3578, is to give the verse a general future reference. This interpretation, it is to be noted, is in the end rejected by al-Ṭabarī, on the grounds of "agreement [ijmā']" on the evidence according to the interpreters."<sup>4</sup>

Finally, it should be added, al-Kalbī seems to be alone in glossing "to them" as the Jews<sup>5</sup> but he does not phrase this in terms of a sabab nor does it find entry into any asbāb text consulted.

## Notes to 2/11

1. Berlin 3578, f. 5a; al-Ṭabarī I 288, reports 339-340 also makes this explicit.
2. Berlin 3578, f. 5a.
3. Al-Ṭabarī I 287-288, reports 337-338; al-Ṭabarī glosses mā jā'a as lam yajī'.
4. Al-Ṭabarī I 289; the rejection of eschatological references is a widespread tendency; see below ad 2/214 for another example.
5. Al-Kalbī, p. 4.

2/14           When they meet those who believe,  
                  they say: "We believe";  
                  but when they are alone with their Satans,  
                  they say: "Indeed, we are with you;  
                  we were only mocking (them)"

An extensive narrative is connected with this verse within the asbāb texts, although it does not find its place in either the tafsīr of al-Ṭabarī or of al-Qurṭubī. The version given by al-Wāḥidī,<sup>1</sup> from al-Kalbī (in whose tafsīr it is not found) is quoted word for word by al-Suyūṭī<sup>2</sup> who feels compelled, however, to state that the isnād of the report is extremely untrustworthy (wāḥ<sup>in</sup>jidd<sup>an</sup>) al-Suddī and al-Kalbī being liars, Abū Ṣāliḥ, weak. Berlin 3578<sup>3</sup> gives a shortened version of the same report, while al-ʿIrāqī<sup>4</sup> elaborates it slightly. The basic plot is that ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy, one of the Medinan hypocrites, while out with his companions, encountered a group of Muḥammad's followers. ʿAbd Allāh said to his companions, "Observe how I make fools (sufahā') of these people". He went forward and greeted Abū Bakr, ʿUmar and ʿAlī in turn, praising each of them enormously. ʿAbd Allāh returned to his companions, boasting of how he had deceived the Muslims into thinking he was one of them. Muḥammad's companions returned to Medina, told Muḥammad of the encounter, and the verse was revealed.

The story tells of the basic premise of hypocrisy and acts through narrative means to connect the preceding verse 13 with verse 14, through the use of the word suhafā', fools; verse 13 states:

When it is said to them;  
 "Believe as the people believe",  
 They reply: "Should we believe  
 as the fools (suhafā') believe?"  
 Rather, it is they who are the  
 fools but they do not know it.

The Quranic motif of the hypocrites calling the Muslims "fools" is continued by the exegetical use of the sabab.<sup>5</sup>

A slight variant on the plot occurs in al-ʿIrāqī's version<sup>6</sup> and also in a series of reports given by the Shiʿite al-Ḥaskānī.<sup>7</sup> ʿAlī recognizes ʿAbd Allāh's hypocrisy in the statement: "Shame on you, ʿAbd Allāh! Do not be hypocritical, for the hypocrites are the worst of mankind." ʿAbd Allāh protested that he had joined Islam, but ʿAlī replied, according to al-Ḥaskānī, "May your mother be bereaved of you! You are nothing but a hypocrite!" This encounter was later related to Muḥammad and the revelation was given, indicating ʿAlī's correct view on the matter. It is likely that there is to be found here traces of sectarian dispute, in the attempt to demonstrate ʿAlī as superior to the other future caliphs present at the incident. It is not surprising that such disputes should leave their impress upon the asbāb.

Finally, it should be noted that Berlin 3578 asserts that al-Ḥasan (al-Baṣrī) suggested that the verse is unlimited (muṭlaq) in its application to hypocrites, which indeed would seem to be the most popular exegetical approach outside of the asbāb books. The terminology is once again worthy of note.<sup>8</sup>



## Notes to 2/14

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 20.
2. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, pp. 9-10.
3. Berlin 3578, f. 5a.
4. Al-ʿIrāqī, ff. 1b-2a.
5. It is ad 2/13 that Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 5b adduces a sabab, not recorded elsewhere, setting the scene of the Jews encouraging the pagans to make fun of the Muslims. Al-Qurtubī I 205 has a similar report but ascribes it to al-Kalbī; al-Kalbī's Tafsīr (p. 4) limits identification to the names of the (Jewish) Satans of verse 14.
6. Al-ʿIrāqī, ff. 1b-2a.
7. Al-Ḥaskānī I 72-73.
8. Berlin 3578, f. 5a; see al-Qurtubī I 206 "nazalat fī'l-munāfiqīn".

2/19-20

Or (it is) like rain from the sky in which is darkness and thunder and lightning. They put their fingers in their ears because of the thunder-claps as protection from death. But God encircles the unbelievers. The lightning almost takes away their sight; whenever it gives them light, they walk in it. But when it darkens on them, they stand still. If God wished he would take away their hearing and their sight. Indeed God has power over everything.

Al-Suyūṭī is alone among asbāb authors in bringing forth a sabab for this verse, and a very extensive one at that; the report is derived from al-Ṭabarī's tafsīr, attributed to al-Suddī from Ibn ʿAbbās and Ibn Masʿūd.

Two men of the Medinan hypocrites were fleeing from the prophet to the polytheists when this rain [maṭar] which God mentioned befell them, and in it was loud thunder and thunder-claps and lightning. Everytime the thunder-claps befell them, it made the both of them put their fingers in their ears out of fear [farāq] that the thunder-clap would enter their ears [masāmiʿ] and kill them [taqtuluhumā]. When the lightning flashed they walked in its light and when it did not they stood in their place, not walking. They began saying: "If only we had begun by going to Muḥammad and putting our hands in his [i.e., converting]." So they arose and went out and converted to Islam, putting their hands in his. Their conversion was good. So God made the affair of these two fleeing hypocrites into an extended simile [mathal] applicable to the hypocrites of Medina.

From here the report goes on to explain the application of this story as a simile:

When the hypocrites were present at the assembly of the prophet, they put their fingers in their ears out of fear of the speech of the prophet concerning something that was revealed about them or they were reminded of something; so they were killed. (That is) just like those two fleeing hypocrites who put their fingers in their ears. And (the Quranic statement) "Whenever it gives them light, they walk in it", when their property and children increase and they gain booty or win battles, they walk in it and they say:

"Indeed Muḥammad's religion is true for this time" and they stick to it, just as those two hypocrites walked when the lightning gave them light. And (the Quranic statement) "But when it darkens, they stand still", when their property and children are destroyed and misfortune befalls them, they say: "This is because of the religion of Muḥammad" and they fall back into their disbelief, just as those two hypocrites stood when the lightning darkened for them.<sup>1</sup>

This story is remarkable for a number of reasons; first, nowhere in it is the phrase nazalat fī employed and the exact connection between the "event" and the "revelation" is left open. The absence of nazalat fī may well account for its absence in other asbāb books. Second, the use of Quranic phraseology and the incorporation of Quranic glosses is quite glaring, predominating as they do in the story. Quite clearly, the story is functioning exegetically for specific items of vocabulary: maṭar, rain, in the story is the normal gloss of the Quranic ṣayyib; faraq, fear, glosses the Quranic ḥaḍhr; masāmiʿ, ear, glosses the Quranic ādhān although this latter word is actually used in the story as well; qatala, kill, glosses the Quranic mawt, leaving no doubt in that matter. The molding of Quranic phrases into the story runs throughout the narrative and incorporates about 75 per cent of the Quranic text. Third, and probably most significantly, the sabab acts to concretize the simile in human events. As even the end of al-Suyūṭī's report explains, the verse is normally taken as a simile, the second one in a row after the explicit mention of mathal in verse 17, with the resolution of the vocabulary being rain = the Qur'ān, darkness = the disbelievers and so forth.<sup>2</sup> But the sabab provides an intermediary stage in the interpretation of the terms of the simile. In fact, the sabab would seem

to put forth the idea of an exemplum emerging from the actual wording of the simile rather than the wording being symbolic in character.<sup>3</sup>

Al-Suyūṭī makes no comment upon the report although al-Ṭabarī himself was obviously concerned about it but plainly did not know what to do. He states quite frankly that he does not know if the report is sound and that he can find no reason to suggest that it is not. He leaves the matter open without trying to adduce further evidence as to the truth or falsehood of the report but clearly he opts to ignore its implications and take the more standard interpretation of the verse.<sup>4</sup>

## Notes to 2/19-20

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 10; also al-Ṭabarī I 347-348, report 452 although there are minor differences between the two accounts especially towards the end; there would also appear to be a number of editing or typographical errors in al-Suyūṭī's report which I have corrected by reference to al-Ṭabarī.
2. E.g., Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 6a.
3. See QS 239-240 for the whole problem of exegetical treatment of the mathal; al-Suyūṭī, al-Itqān II 132 [Ḥalabī edition] treats 2/17-20 as examples of zāhir mathal (that is, because the actual term mathal is used in the Qur'ān) but he does not elaborate the story to the extent that he does in Lubāb.
4. Al-Ṭabarī I 353-354; note the editors of al-Ṭabarī, Shākir and Shākir devote much space and effort to trying to evaluate the isnād and value of the report; see I 156-160 (!) note 2 and I 348 note 2.

2/21

Oh you people! Worship your Lord who created you and those who came before you. Perhaps you will act piously.

This verse, the first occurrence in the text of the Qur'ān of the phrase yā ayyuhā'l-nās, provides al-Wāḥidī and Berlin 3578<sup>1</sup> with the occasion to cite a report elaborating a chronological theory about the Qur'ān: the phrase "oh you people" is Meccan, while "oh you who believe" yā ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū is Medinan. Analyses of this type are termed by al-Ja'barī (according to al-Zarkashī<sup>2</sup>) to be of the qiyāsī method of determining Meccan and Medinan sūras.<sup>3</sup> Other such instances are that the stories of the prophets and the destroyed communities are all considered as belonging to sūras of the Meccan period also, while all statements of obligations and penalties are from the Medinan period.

Both al-Wāḥidī and the author of Berlin 3578 seem aware, however, of a difference between asbāb and this chronological reckoning, for both go on to make it clear what is at stake in their adducing this report: that verses 21-24 are addressed to the polytheists of Mecca and that verse 25, which begins wa-bashshir alladhīna āmanū "give greetings to those who believe" is addressed to the believers of Medina. In other words, and al-Wāḥidī makes the process quite plain, the qiyāsī chronological methodology is deflected totally by interpreting the actual report as intending to give information about who is addressed, khitāb li; what the report is interpreted to give is exegetical context--polytheists or believers--rather than time or place of revelation--Mecca or Medina.<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to note that al-Qurṭubī does not follow the approach of al-Wāḥidī but rather cites the basic report only then to reject the

statement as unsound since it is known, according to al-Qurṭubī, that both sūra 2 and sūra 4 are Medinan but yet both contain the phrase "oh you people".<sup>5</sup>

## Notes to 2/21

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp.20-21; Berlin 3578, f. 5a.
2. Al-Zarkashī, al-Burhān I 189.
3. On various approaches to this, see Abū 'Ubayd, Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān, ff. 51a-52b; al-Zarkashī, al-Burhān I 187-205 (naw 9); al-Suyūṭī, al-Itqān I 6-12 [Ḥalabī edition] (naw 1).
4. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 21; note that Berlin 3578, f. 5a, presents some alternative identifications for verse 21 as well: the unbelievers (according to al-Suddī) or the hypocrites (according to Muqātil; see his Tafsīr, f. 6b).
5. Al-Qurṭubī I 225.



2/23

If you are in doubt  
concerning what we reveal to our servant  
then bring a sūra like it  
and call upon your witnesses other  
than God if you are sincere.

This is the first of the famous taḥaddī or challenge verses found in the text of the Qur'ān. Only Berlin 3578 has a sabab for this verse among the asbāb books.

From Ibn 'Abbās: the Jews  
said: "What Muḥammad brings  
us does not resemble revelation [wahy]  
We are certainly in doubt [shakk]  
about it." So (the verse) was revealed  
[fa-nazalat].<sup>1</sup>

The use of the work shakk for "doubt" in this report is in line with the common exegetical gloss of rayb found in the Quranic passage.<sup>2</sup> Muqātil brings forth a similar report, although phrased somewhat differently, once again concerning the Jews,<sup>3</sup> while al-Qurṭubī, who has the same report, attributes it to the polytheists.<sup>4</sup> All three reports have the identical exegetical phrase: wa annā la-fī shakk minhu, "We are certainly in doubt about it", which demonstrates plainly that the central part of the report is the gloss rayb-shakk. The other matter of context is obviously a concern of some debate; al-Ṭabarī who adduces no sabab for the verse takes the widest context possible, including polytheists, hypocrites and the disbelievers from among the people of the book.<sup>5</sup> The sabab seems to serve to make more specific the context of the passage. For some of the exegetes, of course, the context of the polytheists has already been established by verse 21, treated above.

## Notes to 2/23

1. Berlin 3578, f. 5b.
2. E.g., Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 530 ad 2/2; Ibn Qutayba, Tafsīr gharīb al-Qur'ān, p. 39 ad 2/2.
3. Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 5b; Muqātil actually names the Jews: Rifā'a ibn Zayd and Zayd ibn 'Amr. This is in keeping with his tafsīr as a whole; see QS 135-136.
4. Al-Qurtubī I 231-232.
5. Al-Tabarī I 372.

2/26

Indeed God is not ashamed to form a simile from the gnat or something higher. Those who believe, they know that it is the truth from their Lord; but those who disbelieve say: "What does God mean by this parable?..."

A number of asbāb reports are found for this verse in al-Suyūṭī, al-Wāḥidī and Berlin 3578, all of which tell basically the same story: extended similes included in the Qur'ān were ridiculed by Muḥammad's opponents and the verse was revealed as a rebuttal. There is, however, debate over exactly which parables were being ridiculed and exactly who the ridiculing opponents were.

Two choices are presented for which similes are intended; the first makes reference to the two examples just cited in the Qur'ān: the man who kindled the fire in 2/17 and the rain from the sky in 2/19. This solution pays attention to the context and canonical order of the passage.<sup>1</sup> The alternate choice seems more concerned to do justice to the Quranic phrase mā ba'ūda fa mā fawqahā, "of gnats or of something greater"; cited are the extended similes of the dhubāb "fly" in 22/73 and the 'ankabūt "spider", in 29/41.<sup>2</sup> Ba'ūda is frequently glossed by exegetes as simply something weak or small;<sup>3</sup> dhubāb as "fly" certainly fits that category as 'ankabūt, spider, fits fawqahā, the fly being the favorite food of the spider. The intention of this choice of similes seems exegetical.

The question of which opponents of Muḥammad ridiculed him about these extended similes is, it seems, related to the choice of similes as well. One possible opponent group was the Jews and they are always pictured as ridiculing the fly and spider similes by laughing and saying that such talk "does not resemble the speech of God" or asking

rhetorically, "Is this supposed to resemble the speech of God?", a gloss of the Quranic "What does God mean by this simile?" The dispute is plainly polemical, over the respective merits of Jewish and Muslim revelation and does not touch on the meaning of the simile.<sup>4</sup> The other group of opponents to Muḥammad, the polytheists, makes exactly the same accusation against the Qur'ān and these extended similes in other versions of the sabab; this once again demonstrates the interchangeability of these two groups in the accounts of the life of Muḥammad.<sup>5</sup>

That considerations of Quranic context play greatly in selecting the examples of similes as being 2/17 and 2/19 is confirmed by the fact that it is always the "hypocrites" who are pictured as confronting Muḥammad about these specific similes and verses. "God is above making such similes", the hypocrites are given to say.<sup>6</sup> It would seem that such an understanding goes back to the initial report of Mujāhid concerning the 13 verses being revealed specifically about the hypocrites. Reading scripture in its canonical order and giving consideration to the connection between various pericopes--that is, paying attention to the context--provides the exegetical impulse for the citation of such asbāb reports. It is to be noted that al-Ṭabarī, and following him al-Suyūṭī, argues precisely this point, thus giving support to this version of the sabab.<sup>7</sup> As well, al-Suyūṭī considers the mention of the polytheists inappropriate in connection with this verse "because it is Medinan"; (!)<sup>8</sup> the introduction of the Jews into al-Wāḥidī's text he seems to consider a textual error, for he modifies the report which he cites from al-Wāḥidī to make it read "polytheists" and seems to be able to conveniently ignore the multiplicity of reports in other works which leave little doubt that al-Wāḥidī did intend to cite the Jews in the passage.<sup>9</sup>

## Notes to 2/26

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 21, first report; Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 10, first report; Berlin 3578, f. 5b., second report; al-Ṭabarī I 398, the same as al-Wāḥidī's report.
2. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 21-22, second and third report; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, pp. 10-11, second, third and fourth reports (from 'Abd al-Razzāq in whose tafsīr the report would seem not to be found although there are numerous large water-stains at the beginning of the manuscript making reading difficult); Berlin 3578, f. 5b., first report; al-Ṭabarī I 400; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 7a.
3. E.g., al-Ṭabarī I 401, 402.
4. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 21 second report; Berlin 3578, f. 5b., first report; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 7a; al-Qurṭubī I 235.
5. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 21-22, third report; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, 10-11, second and third (see below) reports; al-Ṭabarī I 400; al-Qurṭubī I 235.
6. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 21, first report; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 10, first report; Berlin 3578, f. 5b, second report; al-Ṭabarī I 398; al-Qurṭubī I 235.
7. Al-Ṭabarī I 400; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 11.
8. Lubāb, p. 11.
9. Lubāb, p. 11; compare al-Wāḥidī, Wasīṭ, f. 17b and Wajīz, p. 8, where the Jewish report concerning the parables of the fly and spider is cited. Note that in the order of presentation this is al-Wāḥidī's second report of three in Asbāb yet apparently his preferred one; see also Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 7a and note that al-Kalbī, p. 5 glosses the party as the Jews.

2/44

Do you order right conduct for the people  
but forget yourselves while reciting the  
scripture? Will you not understand?

This verse comes within a section of the Qur'ān introduced  
yā banī isrā'īl in verse 40; included in verse 42 is the familiar charge  
of kitmān, "concealing", made against the Jews. However no asbāb  
reports are included for those verses in the books collecting such items,  
although within the context of a tafsīr such as Muqātil's, many such reports  
are to be found, explaining the circumstances of the "concealing"  
charge and so forth.<sup>1</sup>

Al-Wāḥidī, followed by al-Suyūṭī, and Berlin 3578 all give  
the same basic report, however, regarding verse 44:

The verse was revealed about the Jews of  
Medina. A certain man had said to his son-  
in-law and to his relatives and to those with  
him (and among them were some who were in  
foster relationship with the Muslims): "Be  
upright in your religion and in what this man -  
meaning Muḥammad - orders you to do! Indeed  
his command is true!" So they had ordered the  
people to do that but they did not do it.<sup>2</sup>

There seem to be two basic notions at work here, one of exemplifying  
Jewish hypocrisy<sup>3</sup> and the other, glossing the Quranic birr, "right  
conduct", which is equated with the sunna of Muḥammad. Even the Jews,  
this sabab seems to be arguing, acknowledged the legitimacy of the sunna,  
that is, following the orders of Muḥammad, although, of course, in their  
hypocrisy they did not follow it. That we have a trace of uṣūl al-fiqh  
arguments here is certainly not impossible, especially given the previous  
verse (v. 43) where the Quranic injunctions of prayer, charity and community  
worship are enjoined.<sup>4</sup>

## Notes to 2/44

1. Muqātil, Tafsīr, ff. 9a-9b; see also Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 551. and SM 17 but this relates to 2/159.
2. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 22 report from al-Kalbī, also Wajīz, p. 12; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 11; Berlin 3578, f. 5b is slightly different:

The Jews said to those from their families who had converted to Islam secretly: "Be upright in what you are in and do what he (Muḥammad) says, for it is the truth." So the verse was revealed.

Also see al-Qurṭubī I 365 who adds other reports, found nowhere else, concerning precisely what the Jewish rabbis said.

3. See Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 9b for an even further abbreviated report: "The Jews said to some of Muḥammad's companions: 'Muḥammad is true, so follow him properly'", expressing only the notion of hypocrisy.
4. See e.g., Ibn al-ʿArabī I 20-21 on legal deductions from verse 43. On uṣūl arguments in the form of asbāb see comments in Burton, The Collection of the Qur'ān, chp. 2 and QS 170-202.

2/45      Seek help with patience and prayer!  
 Indeed it is hard except for those  
 who are humble.

Both al-Wāḥidī and Berlin 3578 cite asbāb for this verse, revealing a basic conflict over concerns for context--quite clearly the passage would seem to follow on the preceding ones and be addressed to the Jews--and for the legal application of the verse, imposing the regulation of prayer and, some add, fasting (by glossing sabr, patience, as sawm).<sup>1</sup>

Berlin 3578 and al-Wāḥidī agree that some people think the verse is addressed to the Muslims alone and that it concerns legal injunctions.<sup>2</sup> But both authors clearly prefer seeing the verse as addressed (khiṭāb li in al-Wāḥidī) to the Jews. Berlin 3578 paraphrases the verse as: "that is, oh you who believe in Moses! Believe in Muḥammad and seek help against your leaders and what is repeated by them!"<sup>3</sup> Muqātil, too, elaborates this Jewish context, but in a specific way while glossing la-kabīra "hard" in the following way: "That is, when we changed the qibla from Jeruslaem to the Ka'ba, that was hard on the Jews; among them [the Jews] was Jiddī ibn Akḥṭab and Sa'd ibn 'Amr the poet and others."<sup>4</sup>

Al-Wāḥidī includes a significant addition to his Jewish context report by adding that while the verse may have been addressed to the Jews, it was in fact for all believers;<sup>5</sup> that is, although the context is specific, the application is general. Indeed, that would seem to be the point of the halakhic analysis made by al-Jaṣṣāṣ and al-Qurṭubī for the verse<sup>6</sup> where no mention at all is made of a sabab and, basically, the context is ignored. On the other hand, it may well be significant that Muqātil whose Jewish context for the passage is well-established in his tafsīr, does not cite this verse in his legal work Khams mi'a āya



within the bāb al-ṣalāt.<sup>7</sup> The sabab would seem to deflect potential legal import of given verses by specifying a non-believer context.

## Notes to 2/45

1. See e.g., al-Tabarī II 11.
2. Berlin 3578, f. 5b; al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 22, also Wajīz, p. 13 introduced wa-qāla ba'dhum.
3. F. 5b.
4. Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 9b.
5. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 22.
6. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 33; al-Qurṭubī I 371-375.
7. Muqātil, Khams mi'a āya, ff. 2b-12b.

2/62

Those who believe and those who  
are Jews and Christians and Sabians  
who believe in God and the last day  
and do good deeds, they will have  
their reward with their Lord; they  
will have no fear, nor will they grieve.

There seems to be no basic dispute over this verse that it was revealed in connection with Salmān al-Fārisī; al-Wāhidī and al-Suyūṭī both produce three reports to this effect and Berlin 3578 has one. In al-Ṭabarī, the verse provides the occasion to present an extensive story, on the authority of al-Suddī, of Salmān's spiritual quest from Persia to Medina, similar to the one recounted in the Sīra of Ibn Ishāq.<sup>1</sup> Towards the end of the four page account in al-Ṭabarī occurs the basic thrust of the common sabab:

When he [Salmān] spoke of his companions and told of their story, and he said: "They used to fast and pray and believe in you (Muḥammad) and witness that you would become a prophet." When Salmān was finished his praise of them, the prophet said to him: "Oh Salmān, they are of the people of the fire!" That was unbearable for Salmān and he said to him: "If they perceived you and believed you and they followed you...[then]...!?" So God revealed this verse [2/62].<sup>2</sup>

This is certainly one case where the sabab does not act in a very overt way as an exegetical tool. To some extent, the verse is made ambiguous by the sabab: is the revelation a rebuke to Muḥammad or a confirmation of his statement? Al-Ṭabarī clearly sees it as the latter: that the Jews who clung to Moses and the Torah after the coming of Jesus were destroyed, and likewise those Christians who cling to Jesus after the coming of Muḥammad are to be destroyed;<sup>3</sup> the implication of the Quranic verse is taken as being that those who are truly Jews, Christians and Sabians

and who believe in God and the last day and do good works will, of course, recognize Muḥammad and become true Muslims.

It seems, however, that there could be an opposing interpretation of the verse, and it seems to me of the sabab, as indicated by a report in al-Ṭabarī that Ibn ʿAbbās considered this verse to be abrogated by Q. 3/85:

He who desires as a religion one other than Islam,  
it will not be accepted from him. He will be  
of those who lose in the hereafter.<sup>4</sup>

This would seem to imply that Ibn ʿAbbās' report took 2/62 as indicating the possibility of salvation through other religions (which is what Salmān seems to have expected) but that was abrogated by 3/85, which implies a notion of Islamic exclusivity (a view tempered, to be sure, by the identification of Abraham as a Muslim).

That in fact the story of Salmān al-Fārisī is part of the mythic elaboration of the praeparatio evangelica, emphasizing both the prediction of the coming of Muḥammad by those of other faiths, and the concept of the ritual activity of Islam (in this case, prayer, fasting, believing, witnessing), as pointed by Wansbrough,<sup>5</sup> is an important notion. The story may well have simply become attached to this verse of the Qur'ān due to the common concern with other faiths, and the connection may well be no more than a case of an elaboration of a popular story attached to a seemingly appropriate Quranic prop with no purpose other than haggadic edification.

## Notes to 2/62

1. Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 214-222.
2. Al-Ṭabarī II 154; also al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 22-24.  
al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 11; Berlin 3578, f. 5b; also see Muqātil,  
Tafsīr, f. 12b.
3. Al-Ṭabarī II 154.
4. Al-Ṭabarī II 155; also al-Qurṭubī I 436; also cf. Hibat Allāh,  
p. 11 and al-Baghdādī, Beyazit 445, f. 46a.
5. SM 4-7 esp. 6.

2/75           Are you eager that they believe you  
                  although a group of them has heard  
                  the speech of God and has then knowingly  
                  altered it after understanding it?

Although some exegetical debate is evidenced, the general opinion sees this verse addressed in the first place to the Muslims in general (the "you" of the verse is plural) concerning the Jews, with the possibility left open that Muḥammad himself is being spoken to.<sup>1</sup> Where a difference of opinion does exist and where some of the asbāb books add their information is over the context of the "altering", tahrīf, of scripture.

That two historical periods present themselves as possible candidates for the charge of tahrīf seems to have been evident to the exegetes. First, the historical period of Muḥammad presents itself with the common charge of the Jewish alteration of the description of Muḥammad in the Torah and the affair of the stoning penalty for adultery.<sup>2</sup> These two are, of course, the constants of Jewish-Muslim polemic pictured in Medina although the specific matter of the stoning penalty is connected by many exegetes with Q. 5/41:

They change the words from after their places  
                  saying: "If you are given this, take it  
                  but if you are not given it, beware!"<sup>3</sup>

The polemical motifs act as exegetical glosses for many different verses whether they employ the terminology tahrīf or kitmān. Second, the conception of tahrīf is antedated to the time of Moses; al-Wāḥidī gives a report, the basic thrust of which is given in a variety of sources in a variety of different ways:

(The verse) was revealed about [nazalat fī] the  
                  seventy whom Moses selected to go with him  
                  to God. And when they went with him and  
                  heard the speech of God and what he ordered

and forbade, they returned to their people.  
 As for the true believers, they carried out what  
 they heard. But a group of them said: "We heard  
 God say at the end of his speech: 'If you are  
 able to do these things, then do them; if you do not  
 wish to, then do not do (them), there  
 is no harm in that!'"<sub>44</sub>

The basis of this account--including the motif of the seventy--  
 is of course Biblical (and the later elaboration thereof), centered  
 around Exodus 24 and 32, somewhat modified to be appropriate to the  
 polemical charge of tahrīf;<sup>5</sup> this is a common charge, it is to be  
 noted, within the Near Eastern religious framework from before the  
 time of the rise of Christianity and certainly important from that  
 time on.

Most significant here is that al-Wāḥidī and the author of  
 Berlin 3578 but not, note, al-Suyūṭī, consider this report to be a  
sabab; the phrase nazalat fī here implies "revealed about" and that  
 would seem to be the definition of sabab taken by these two authors--  
 that it is the exegetical context that is important. Of course, al-  
 Suyūṭī, as has already been noted, has criticized al-Wāḥidī precisely  
 on this point;<sup>6</sup> while it is perhaps redundant to state it, what is  
 involved here, despite al-Suyūṭī, is not "error" but terminological  
 change.

## Notes to 2/75

1. E.g., al-Qurṭubī II 1.
2. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 25, second report, Wajīz, p. 20; Berlin 3578, f. 5b, first report from al-Suddī and Mujāhid in whose tafsīr that basic understanding is portrayed, see p. 80.
3. E.g., Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 565.
4. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 25, first report; Berlin 3578, ff. 5b-6a second report; al-Qurṭubī II 1-2; al-Ṭabarī II 246-247; Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 536-537; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 15a, the fullest of all the reports.
5. Note that a report al-Qurṭubī II 2 cites from al-Kalbī, which implies disbelief only and not tahrīf, is rejected as "false, unsound".
6. See above Chapter I pp. 26-27.



2/76

When they meet those who believe they  
say: "We believe" but when they take  
counsel with each other they say :  
"Have you told them of what God has  
told you so that they may argue  
with you about it in front of your Lord?  
Do you not understand?"

Implicit in this verse seem to be the notions of hypocrisy--  
saying "We believe" in public but not in private--and concealment--that  
certain things should not be told. It is not surprising, given the  
polemical charges common in Islam, that the verse is seen to focus upon  
the Jews.

Al-Suyūṭī is alone among the asbāb books in citing a sabab  
for this verse, and, in fact, he manages to find reports with three  
variations on the basic theme.

Al-Suyūṭī's first report, taken from al-Ṭabarī on the authority  
of Mujāhid, is widespread in exegetical works and is only a little  
short of amusing:

On the day of the (raid on Banū) Qurayza, the  
prophet came to their forts and said:  
"Oh brothers of monkeys! Oh brothers of pigs!  
Oh slaves of tāghūt!"  
They said (to their fellows): "Who told this  
to Muḥammad? [!] This could not have come  
except from you! Have you been telling them  
[i.e., the Muslims] of what God told you so  
that it may be a proof to them against you?"<sub>1</sub>

What is intended to be concealed here it seems is the true nature of  
contemporary Jewish religion. The suggestion that some of the Jews had  
been turned into monkeys, qirada, due to Sabbath transgression is several  
times mentioned in the Qur'ān (2/65; 7/166) and such imagery is continued  
in this sabab; it is perhaps these episodes of Jewish history [sic]  
that the Jews are pictured as not wanting to reveal.<sup>2</sup> The basic

narrative episode of the sabab, it should be noted, is found in Ibn Ishāq's Sīra although there Muḥammad merely uses the phrase "Oh brothers of monkeys" and the Quranic verse is uncited.<sup>3</sup> Various sources elaborate the asbāb report in line with the Sīra account by citing the role of 'Alī in doing the initial scouting of the Jewish fort and overhearing Jewish slander against Muḥammad.<sup>4</sup> This part of the episode seems to be brought forth in order, perhaps, to justify Muḥammad's incisive invective against the Jews on this occasion.

The second report of al-Suyūṭī is more typical in that the concealment revolves around evidence of Muḥammad's prophethood in the Torah. As such, the sabab is unexceptional.<sup>5</sup>

The third report of al-Suyūṭī is similar in a sense to the first but revolves around the aspect of Jewish election by God.

(The verse) was revealed about some Jews who believed but then became hypocrites. They used to tell the Arab believers of what they [the Jews] had been warned. Some (of the Jews) said to each other: "Did you tell them of what God has told you of the penalty of their saying: 'We are dearer to God than you and more honoured by God than you'?"<sup>6</sup>

All three of the asbāb, then, act to define exactly what it is that the Jews desire to conceal or have concealed. Elaborations of the notion of hypocrisy, it is to be noted, are minor--in the first two instances implicit only and in the third, made explicit by blank assertion; hypocrisy in no case acts to further the narrative.

## Notes to 2/76

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 11; similar to al-Ṭabarī II 252, reports 1345, 1346, identical to report 1347; also found in incomplete form in Mujaḥid, Tafsīr, pp. 80-81.
2. Also on ṭāghūt see Q. 4/51 and SM 19.
3. Ibn Ishāq, Sīra II 234.
4. E.g., al-Qurṭubī II 3-4.
5. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, pp. 11-12; also see Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 537 which equals al-Ṭabarī II 251, report 1340 and similar to his reports 1335-1338, II 249-250. Muqātil, Tafsīr, ff. 15a-15b has a similar report where the Jews who ask "Have you told them?" are named.
6. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 12 but the wording seems corrupt, so the text in al-Ṭabarī II 253, report 1348 has been followed here; also al-Qurṭubī II 3.

2/79

Woe to those who write the book  
with their own hands and then say:  
"This is from God" in order to  
sell it at a small price. Woe  
to them for what their hands write  
and woe to them for what they gain.

Various asbāb reports are found for this verse, virtually all of which centre on the notion of the malicious alteration of Jewish scripture. Al-Wāḥidī provides the most extensive report:

(The Jews) changed the description of the prophet in their book and made him a man with long hair and of medium brown (colouring). They said to their companions and followers: "Look at the description of the prophet who is to appear at the end of time; it does not resemble the description of this (man)." The Rabbis and the learned ones used to receive provisions from the rest of the Jews and they feared that they would not receive it if they revealed the (true) description; therefore they changed it.<sup>1</sup>

While similar reports of scriptural falsification are found in al-Suyūṭī and Berlin 3578 and while the latter adds that the Jews did this out of "distaste" and "envy" (of the Arabs being chosen to receive the final prophet), al-Wāḥidī's report is unique in that it combines with the standard tahrīf charge, a gloss on the monetary aspect of the Quranic verse; that is, the Jewish leaders "sold", figuratively at least, the description of Muḥammad for a small price, their free food-supply.

Al-Ṭabarī brings forth a series of nine exegetical traditions on this verse, a number of which are similar to the reports given in the asbāb books.<sup>2</sup> The basic difference between the exegetical reports cited by al-Ṭabarī and the asbāb reports is not a matter of narrative, it would seem, (for compare al-Suyūṭī and Berlin 3578 where the reports contain no direct speech and are all in the third person) but rather

that they lack the statement of the connection between the exegetical statement and the Qur'ān (i.e., nazalat fī). While the reports give virtually identical information whether understood traditionally as "exegetical" reports or "asbāb" reports, the real difference, as becomes plain in a verse such as this, is the matter of the connective phrase nazalat fī.

Notable, too, within these reports given by al-Ṭabarī are some traditions which suggest that what is involved in this verse is not tahrīf, alteration, of the Torah but rather the writing of entire books and claiming that they are from God (Mishna? Talmud? variations on that polemical theme have certainly been common within the Christian world) which would suggest that the polemic over scripture between Jews and Muslims may have gone further than the charge of alteration and faulty transmission.<sup>3</sup> An isolated report also in al-Ṭabarī pictures the Gentiles (ummiyūn) as upset because they had no prophet nor a book, so they wrote a scripture themselves and proceeded to tell a group of "lowly ignoramuses" that the book was from God, in order to be able to sell it to them.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, al-Ṭabarī (followed by al-Qurṭubī) has his perpetually impertinent questioner ask: "What is the meaning of 'Woe to those who write the book with their own hands'? How can one write without the hand?"<sup>5</sup> One should not overlook the distinct possibility that al-Ṭabarī was endowed with a certain sense of humour, but the point does lead al-Ṭabarī to a discussion of the difference between author and writer and to state that the verse most certainly intends a stricture upon the

Jews and that it does not necessarily imply a restriction upon writing, buying or selling books. Indeed, the sabab (or exegetical reports at least for al-Ṭabarī) in this case serves to remove possible "misinterpretation" with serious legal implications.

## Notes to 2/79

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 24 and Wajīz, p. 21 in more general terms; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 12 second report (the first report merely says the verse was revealed about ahl al-Kitāb); Berlin 3578, f. 6a; al-Qurṭubī II 9 from al-Kalbī and Ibn Ishāq although I have not located a similar report on the Sīra. Also see Mujāhid, p. 81.
2. Al-Tabarī II 270-272.
3. Al-Tabarī II 270-272, reports 1388, 1393.
4. Al-Tabarī II 270, report 1389.
5. Al-Tabarī II 272-273; al-Qurṭubī II 9.

2/80

They say: "The fire shall touch us for only some numbered days."  
 Say: "Have you taken a promise from God--God never breaks his promise--or are you saying something about God of which you have no knowledge?"

The "they say" of this verse is unanimously glossed as the Jews but two basic important asbāb reports are found about the revelation of the verse which show concern to specify the phrase "some numbered days". The first report, derived from Ibn Ishāq's Sīra, revolves around the motif of "seven";

The prophet came to Medina and the Jews were saying: "The duration of the world is 7000 years. God will punish the people in the fire for a single day in the hereafter for each thousand years of the existence of this world. So there will be seven days of punishment, then punishment will cease." So God revealed about that...[2/80]... 1

The Qur'ān, it should be noted, goes on in verse 81 to proclaim that, rather, the evildoers will reside in hell for eternity.

A second group of reports centres on the motif of 40--with debate whether it is 40 years, days or nights.

The people of the book found that it will take 40 years to cross between the extremities of hell. So they said: "We will be punished in the fire for only (the period) which we find in the Torah." So, when it is the day of resurrection, they will jump into the fire. They will remain in the punishment until they finish the journey, arriving at the Zaqqūm tree on the last of some numbered days. He said: So the keepers of the fire will say: "Oh enemies of God! You claimed that you would be punished in hell only for some numbered days and then the period would be completed. But eternity still remains!!" 2

While this report seems to imply that 40 years was the period that the Jews expected to stay in hell, other reports similar to this one,



but minus the notion of "crossing hell", specify 40 days or 40 nights as the expected period.<sup>3</sup> A few reports suggest that the period of 40 days is deduced from the fact that 40 is the number of worldly acts of devotion assigned to the Jews.<sup>4</sup>

It might be worth pointing out, although the fact should not be a surprise, that no trace of these precise specifications can be found in Jewish tradition; Abraham Katsh states:

The Koranic reference to "a number of days" recalls the talmudic statement that the trial of the transgressors in hell lasts twelve months.

to which he adds a footnote.

According to R. Johanan b Nuri, the judgment of certain sinners will last "(only) from Passover to Pentecost" i.e., seven weeks.<sup>5</sup>

That no direct point of known Jewish tradition should coincide with these asbāb reports should not prove surprising: the suggestion that the Jews have a special covenant with God is rejected in terms which are simply proverbial in such matters rather than actual. The search for a specification of the length of time implied by the term ma'dūda "numbered", may well have influenced, or been influenced by, parallel usages in the Qur'ān (2/184, 2/203, 3/24 [=2/80], 11/8, 12/20), a mode of exegetical influence which certainly should not be discounted. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ' discussion of ayyām ("days") as ambiguous (his concern is primarily over legal implications of the length of menstruation), leads him to suggest that ma'dūda just implies a limited period of time and he does not try to make a halakhic definition out of the material.<sup>6</sup> It may be, therefore, that the motivation for specification of the period of time in these asbāb is primarily the haggadic desire to make known the unknown.

Although it is not included in any of the asbāb books, al-Tabarī and al-Qurṭubī (explicitly calling the report a sabab) cite another report which focuses on the polemical motif of supersession rather than the haggadic motif of specification:

The Prophet said to the Jews: "Who are the people of the fire?" They said: "We were, but we have exchanged places with you!" He said: "You lie!! You know that we cannot replace you." So the verse was revealed.<sup>7</sup>

It would seem that the intention of this report is to make clear that the Quranic phrase "God never breaks his promise" is a parenthetical statement: God has promised that the Jews will go to the fire (!) and that the Muslims cannot replace them (!). This is a promise of God and it cannot be broken. So, the Quranic phrase is not to be understood as the Jews saying: "We have taken a promise from God and God never breaks his promise"<sup>8</sup> but rather that the Jews claim: "We have taken a promise from God" which is implicitly denied by the Qur'ān by the very fact that the Qur'ān affirms that God never breaks his promises. The polemical discussion in the sabab is "primitive" to be sure, but it is certainly a part of a supersession disputation: the claim of Islam to have replaced the earlier dispensations by asserting the notion that God has made no eternal promises to the Jews while at the same time asserting that God never breaks his promises (e.g., in the coming of Muḥammad).

## Notes to 2/80

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 24, first report; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 12, first report; Berlin 3578, f. 6a, first report; al-Qurṭubī II 10, second report; al-Ṭabarī II 277-278, reports 1410, 1411, similar to 1412, 1414. Ibn Isḥāq, Sīra I 538-539; also see Mujāhid, p. 83.
2. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 24-25, second report; Berlin 3578, f. 6a, second report; al-Ṭabarī II 275-276, report 1404 made up of a number of reports but overall similar, including the ending; al-Qurṭubī II 10, third and fourth reports although not including the ending. This report is perhaps unique in its inclusion of eschatological embellishment. All the reports are Ḍaḥḥāk from Ibn ʿAbbās. Cf. al-Kisāʾī, Qisṣa al-anbiyāʾ, p. 18 for the period "500 years" to cross hell; al-Samarqandī, Tanbīh al-Ghāfilīn, translation, p. 234, has 70 (!) years.
3. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 12 second report; al-Ṭabarī II 274-275 reports 1399, 1402.
4. Berlin 3578, f. 6a, third report; al-Qurṭubī II 10, fifth report; al-Ṭabarī II 275, report 1402; al-Kalbī, p. 9, a simple gloss. The motif of "40" is common in Near Eastern literature; consider Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24), Ezra writing the Torah (II Esdras 14), Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4), the age of Muḥammad when receiving the first revelation (Ibn Isḥāq, Sīra I 233) and many others.
5. A. Katsh, Judaism and the Koran, p. 77 and note 2.
6. Al-Jassās I 38-39.
7. Al-Qurṭubī II 10 first report; al-Ṭabarī II 276-277, reports 1406, 1407, 1409 although the first and third of these reports mix the second motif of 40 days/nights with the supersession motif.
8. This, it strikes me, would be a possible translation of the Quranic verse. As far as I have been able to determine this verse does not seem to have generated such supersession polemic other than this rather minor sabab.

2/89

And when a book comes to them from  
 God, confirming what is with them,  
 while earlier they had prayed for  
 victory over those who disbelieve--when  
 what they know comes, they disbelieve it.  
 The curse of God is on the disbelievers!

It is the notion that the Jews (who are unanimously glossed for the "them" in the verse) have, on some occasion, "prayed for victory" which provides the substance of the asbāb reports found for this verse; all of the reports try to answer the perennial questions of why, when and what.

Al-Wāḥidī, al-Suyūṭī and Berlin 3578 all present as their first report the following, although al-Suyūṭī qualifies it by saying that its isnād is weak:

The Jews used to fight with Ghaṭafān; everytime they met, the Jews were put to flight. So they sought protection with this prayer: "Allāhuma, we ask you, by the truth of Muḥammad, the ummi prophet whom you have promised that you will send us at the end of time, help us against them!" So they met them and prayed this (prayer) and sent Ghaṭafān fleeing. But when the prophet was sent, they disbelieved in him, so God revealed...[2/89]...<sub>1</sub>

The second report is similar in intent to the first, but puts forth the understanding the Muḥammad was sent in response to the Jews' prayers for help, rather than coming later:

The Arabs used to pass by the Jews and cause them injury. The Jews found the description of Muḥammad in the Torah and they asked God to send him, so that the Arabs would fight with him. When Muḥammad came they disbelieved in him out of envy and said: "The prophets are from Banū Isrā'īl. Why is it that this one is from Banū Ismā'īl?!"<sub>2</sub>

Both of these reports serve to elaborate and make plain the notion of the Quranic phrase, "while earlier they had prayed for victory

over those who disbelieve", the only difference between the two, it would seem, lying in deciding on the exact historical period of "earlier". The second report is noteworthy for its explicit addition of the polemical motif of Muḥammad as an Arab being objectionable to the Jews; while this was explicit earlier in the notion of Jewish envy, it is now given verbal expression in this report.

A third report indicates a slightly different exegetical concern; it is derived from an account in Ibn Ishāq's Sīra:

The Jews used to seek help to overcome Aws and Khazraj from the prophet before his mission. When God sent him [the prophet] from among the Arabs they disbelieved in him and repudiated what they had said about him. So Mu'ādh ibn Jabal and Bishr ibn al-Barā' and Dāwud ibn Salama said: "Oh Community of Jews: Fear God and submit! You had sought help against us with Muḥammad while we were polytheists and you told us of the mission and you described him to us." Salmān ibn Mishkam of Banū 'l-Naḍīr said: "He has not come to us with anything that we know nor is he whom we had mentioned to you." So God revealed...[2/89]...<sub>3</sub>

This report gives slight mention to the prayer of the Jews but displays a concern for the continuing motif of Jewish rejection of Muḥammad and the Qur'ān, the latter being actually mentioned in verse 89 as a "book", the former glossing perhaps the Quranic phrase "what they know", that is, the description of Muḥammad.

## Notes to 2/89

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 25-26, first report; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 12, first report; Berlin 3578, f. 6a, first report; al-Qurṭubī II 27 only report; all from Ibn ʿAbbās; also see Muqātil, Tafsīr, ff. 16b-17a; reports 1523, 1525, 1526 in al-Ṭabarī II 334-335 are similar.
2. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 26, second report; Berlin 3578, f. 6a, second report; al-Ṭabarī II 335, report 1527; all from al-Suddī.
3. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 12, second report; al-Ṭabarī II 333-334, report 1520; Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 547 all from Ibn ʿAbbās through Ibn Ishāq. Ibn Ishāq has a second report about this verse in which the Jews are given to say to the polytheists who are oppressing them:

"Soon a prophet will be sent to us whom we will follow. His time approaches! With his (help) we will kill you (like) the killing of ʿAd and Iram."

The plot of the report, then, is like the second sabab above although it is not cited in the asbāb books (it is in al-Ṭabarī II 333, report 1519); see Sīra I 541.

2/94

Say: If the last home for you  
especially is with God without the  
rest of the people, then seek death  
if you are sincere!

Al-Suyūṭī cites on the authority of al-Ṭabarī a very short  
sabab for this verse:

The Jews said: "Only those who are Jews shall  
enter paradise". So God revealed...[2/94]...<sub>1</sub>

The statement the Jews are given to say is actually a partial quotation  
of Q. 2/111. Al-Ṭabarī himself presents a more complex position:

The ahl al-ta'wīl differ over the cause  
(sabab) on behalf of which (alladhī min  
ajlihi) God ordered his prophet to call  
upon the Jews to seek death and in which  
way they were ordered to seek it.<sub>2</sub>

Al-Ṭabarī goes on to suggest that "seeking death" can be under-  
stood in one of two ways, first, meaning "pray for death to whichever  
of the two parties is more truthful", that is, it is perhaps the idea  
of a "death-pact" between the Jews and the Muslims,<sup>3</sup> or second, a meaning  
derived from the above sabab embodying the notion of "suicide".<sup>4</sup> By  
citing only one-half of the exegetical information, by isolating a  
single sabab-form, al-Suyūṭī has narrowed the possible range of inter-  
pretation of the verse and ignored what is apparently a matter of  
dispute.

Note should be taken of al-Ṭabarī's use of the term sabab  
in his statement above, for it would seem to be an instance of al-Ṭabarī's  
employment of the word as suggested above,<sup>5</sup> not in the sense of "cause  
of revelation" but of "prompting God". Now admittedly the effect  
of the use may be the same but there is, it would seem, a difference  
as far as the status of the word as a technical term goes.

## Notes to 2/94

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 13; al-Ṭabarī II 364-365, report 1573; also see al-Wāḥidī, Wajīz, p. 25.
2. Al-Ṭabarī II 364.
3. Al-Ṭabarī II 364, report 1571. Also al-Qurtubī II 33; Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 542; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 40.
4. Also see al-Qurtubī II 33; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 17b; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 40.
5. See above Chapter I p. 30.





question of Muḥammad's angelic informants: "One cannot be a prophet unless an angel comes from his Lord with the message."<sup>6</sup> Additionally, often the Jewish protagonist is named, he being ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ṣūriyā.<sup>7</sup> The Jews retort in one way or another that Gabriel is their enemy and that, therefore, they cannot believe in Muḥammad; had the reply of Muḥammad been Michael, then, according to the Jews, their reaction would have been different, for:

Gabriel descended with punishment and killing and destruction; indeed he (has proven himself to be) our enemy many times. The worst occasion was when God revealed to our prophet that the Temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed by a man named Bukhtnassar and he told us of the time when this would be done. So when his time arrived, we sent out the strongest man from Banū Isrāʾīl in order to find Bukhtnassar and kill him. So he set out to find him until he met a young, poor, weak boy in Bābil. Our companion seized him in order to kill him but Gabriel prevented him from doing so and said to our companion: "If it is your Lord who has permitted your destruction, you may not have mastery over him, or if it is not this, for what reason should you kill him?" Our companion believed him and returned to us. Bukhtnassar grew up and became stronger and attacked us and destroyed the Temple. So for this reason (Gabriel) became our enemy.<sup>8</sup>

In the stories of ʿUmar's confrontation with the Jews, ʿUmar asks the Jews about Gabriel, either straight off, or as part of a longer disputation where generally the Jews are pictured as trying to convert ʿUmar to Judaism. When it is revealed to ʿUmar that Gabriel is the enemy of the Jews, while Michael is their favourite, the reason put forth is at least two-fold: that Gabriel has deserted the Jews by taking prophecy to the Arabs (i.e., Muḥammad) or that the Jews are annoyed with Gabriel because he has told Muḥammad of some of their secrets.<sup>9</sup> Both of these motifs are the common statements already noted, witnessing Jewish "perfidy" in recognizing Muḥammad as a prophet but not accepting

him. It is noteworthy that 'Umar's reply to the Jews in this disputation is identical with the later/simultaneously revealed Quranic passage.<sup>10</sup>

One report cited by al-Ṭabarī indicates crossed motifs:

The prophet asked the Jews saying: "I asked you about your book which you read: Do you long for him about whom Jesus brought the message: that there will come to you a prophet named Aḥmad?" They said "Allāhuma, we find you in our book but we reject you because you regard wealth and the spilling of blood as permissible." So God revealed...[2/98]...<sup>11</sup>

It is hard to avoid the opinion that this sabab has evolved from Muslim-Christian polemic and has little to do with the Jews at all; the Aḥmad prophecy, of course, is appropriate only to the Christian context and the charges laid by the "Jews" certainly typify Christian response to Islam. That the basic motif of the sabab should have changed to Muḥammad bringing on the confrontation, and that the dispute does not center about history but rather about "contemporary" events, only adds to the impression of the tangential nature of this report.

All the reports serve to explain why the Jews are pictured as seeing Gabriel as an enemy; as such they are all exegetical and haggadic in nature, although undoubtedly polemically based.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, al-Ṭabarī once again uses the term sabab in this discussion, saying people "disagree over the sabab on account of which (the Jews) said that (i.e., Gabriel is their enemy)"; once again, the term is used in a sense close to its later technical one but yet is clearly not intending the fully developed meaning, "cause of revelation", but simply "cause" or "reason".<sup>13</sup>

## Notes to 2/97-98

1. Al-Wāḥidī cites one sabab for verse 97 and then, separately, three for verse 98; however the three for verse 98 are explicitly indicated by al-Wāḥidī as applying to both verses. Al-Suyūṭī treats both verses together in all his reports. Berlin 3578 separates them but has one report under verse 97 that al-Wāḥidī has under verse 98. In order to avoid more confusion than necessary, the verses are treated together here.
2. See esp. QS 122-126 on the notion of the "rabbinical test".
3. Cf. QS 62-63: Wansbrough divides the motifs into three:
  - (a) Gabriel and the destruction of the temple;
  - (b) Gabriel has taken prophethood out of the Jews;
  - (c) Gabriel has revealed Jewish secrets to Muḥammad.
 The last two motifs are seen in this analysis as being intimately intertwined through the use of the person ʿUmar.
4. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 28, third report, also Wajīz, p. 25; Berlin 3578, f. 6b, fourth report; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 13, second report; Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 543-544; al-Ṭabarī II 377-380, reports 1605, 1606 (= Ibn Ishāq).
5. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 13, first report, cited from al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Tafsīr VI 8-9.
6. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 26, first report; Berlin 3578, f. 6a, first report; al-Qurṭubī II 36, his only report, credited to al-Tirmidhī; al-Ṭabarī II 380, report 1607.
7. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 28, third report; Berlin 3578 f. 6b, fourth report; glossed in al-Kalbī, p. 11.
8. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 28 third report.
9. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 27 second report; al-Wāḥidī's fourth report, attributed to Muqātil in whose tafsīr it is also found (f. 18a), is minus the disputation, consisting only of the statement that Gabriel gave prophethood to the Arabs. Berlin 3578, f. 6b, third report (his second report = Muqātil); al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, pp. 13-14, third and fourth reports; al-Ṭabarī II 381-386, reports 1608-1616. In all these texts, some reports also suggest the destructiveness of Gabriel.
10. ʿalā lisān ʿUmar; the passage is one of the muwāfaqāt, see above Chapter I, pp. 21-23.

11. Al-Tabarī II 394-395, report 1634.
12. The question of why the Jews "really" did or did not consider Gabriel their enemy has been extensively treated in the literature: see e.g., A. Katsh, Judaism and the Koran, pp. 85-91 and the bibliography cited there, also QS 62-63.
13. Al-Tabari II 377 also 380.

2/100      Is it not that everytime we make a  
               covenant, a party of them rejects it?  
               No, most of them are not believers.<sup>1</sup>

Al-Suyūṭī is alone among the asbāb books in having a report  
 for this verse, although it is found also in Ibn Ishāq, al-Ṭabarī and  
 al-Qurṭubī:

Mālik ibn al-Ṣayf (or Dayf) said, when  
 the prophet was sent and had reminded them  
 of the covenant which had been  
 made with them and what had been  
 promised to them about Muḥammad: "By  
 God, there is no promise to us about  
 Muḥammad, nor was a covenant made  
 with us!" So God revealed...[2/100]...<sup>2</sup>

The Jewish context is extended with the continuation of the standard  
 polemical motifs of the covenant and its fulfilment by Muḥammad.

Al-Qurṭubī adduces two other reports which suggest a different  
 locale of the conflict: the agreements between Muḥammad and the Jews  
 while in Medina.<sup>3</sup> Such a version acts to place the verse within a more  
 definite historical situation in Muslim salvation history rather than  
 seeing the verse in terms of the ahistorical polemical motifs, but  
 serves the same exegetical function of defining the concept of the covenant  
 and further elaborating Jewish "treachery".

## Notes to 2/100

1. The editor of al-Suyūṭī's Lubāb includes this sabab with the previous one for verse 99 under the heading "verses 99/100". Other sources make it clear that this is probably an editing error and al-Suyūṭī does not intend that the verses be taken together.
2. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 14; Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 547-548; al-Ṭabarī II 400-401, reports 1639, 1640; al-Qurṭubī II 40; also al-Wāḥidī, Wajīz, p. 26.
3. Al-Qurṭubī II 40.

2/102      They follow what the Satans recited  
 about the Kingdom of Solomon.  
 Solomon did not disbelieve but the  
 Satans disbelieved, teaching the people  
 magic and that which was revealed  
 to the two angels of Bābil, Hārūt and  
 Mārūt; they taught no one without  
 saying: "We are temptation; do not disbelieve."  
 From them they learned what divides a  
 man and his wife. But they did not hurt  
 anyone with it except by the permission of God.  
 They learned what hurt them and did not profit  
 them, knowing that he who buys it, he will  
 have no part in the hereafter. Evil was what  
 they sold themselves for; if only they had known!

The asbāb reports for this exceptionally long verse all connect primarily to the very opening phrase of the verse. Al-Suyūṭī's first report simply sets the stage for the confrontation between Muḥammad and the Jews of Medina:

The Jews said: "Look at Muḥammad!  
 He blends truth and falsehood! He mentions  
 Solomon among the prophets, whereas he was  
 a magician (able to) ride the wind!"  
 So God revealed...[2/102]...<sub>1</sub>

Al-Suyūṭī's second report changes the focus slightly to a more "comparative scripture" debate:

The Jews frequently asked Muḥammad about matters in the Torah; everytime they asked about something from that, God would reveal what they asked about and (thus) defeat them. When they perceived that, they said: "This (man) is more knowledgeable about what was revealed to us than we are!" Then they asked him about magic and they argued with him about it, so God revealed...[2/102]...<sub>2</sub>

It is around these basic notions found in al-Suyūṭī's asbāb that a number of other reports as found elsewhere revolve. The Islamic understanding of the Jewish legends about Solomon are recounted,<sup>3</sup> leaving the explanation that the Jews were deceived by satans into thinking that Solomon used magic to gain his power. One of the many reports is the following found in al-Wāḥidī:



The Satans used to eavesdrop on voices from heaven until one of them came upon a word of truth. So when the truth was tested by one of them, he swore with it seventy lies and put them into the hearts of men. Solomon was informed of that, so he took (the word) and hid it under the throne. When Solomon died, the Satans came from everywhere and said: "Would you like to know of the forbidden treasure of Solomon of which there is no comparable other treasure?" They said: "Yes". He said: "Under his throne". They took it out and said: "This is magic!" The people passed it on (from generation to generation). So God revealed the absolution of Solomon...[2/102]...<sup>4</sup>

A variety of similar legends is found in other reports, in general based on sources such as the qisṣa al-anbiyā'.<sup>5</sup> The significant element in a number of the reports is the variable attempt to connect the prophetic legend with the historical period of Muḥammad, implicitly glossing the initial words of the Quranic phrase "they follow" as the Jews of Muḥammad's time. In some reports the connection of time periods is made quite explicitly, by putting al-Suyūṭī's first report after the full legend, for example; the point is always that the Jews still practised magic and that they still attributed it to Solomon. That a few reports do not attempt to connect the events of Solomon's life to Muḥammad's time<sup>6</sup> probably should be taken to indicate, once again, a wider definition of sabab than normally reckoned.

The halakhists devote a fair bit of space to this verse, all of the ahkām texts devoting space to at least one of the legends of Solomon.<sup>7</sup> Two basic problems seem to have been raised: one, was magic actually possible? and two, what was the penalty for practising magic? The asbāb reports have little relevance to the latter question but may be thought applicable to the first. However, none of the texts deals with the problem in that way, but rather they appeal to the "wording" of the Quranic verse

in order to assert the possibility of magic (only the Mu'tazila apparently thought differently) and leave it at that. Ibn al-'Arabi, in fact, devotes space to pointing out the problems with the sabab which he cites, and thereby almost destroying the relevance of the report to begin with.<sup>8</sup>

## Notes to 2/102

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 14; al-Ṭabarī II 416-417, report 1666 with an extensive preamble; also close to II 407-408, report 1650 and II 417, report 1667 both from Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 544; also see al-Qurṭubī II 41-42 and Berlin 3578, f. 6b, fourth report.
2. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 14; also al-Ṭabarī II 406-407, report 1647 although the attribution is different.
3. For the general outline of the legends see EI "Sulaymān"; al-Kisā'ī, Qisas al-anbiyā', pp. 278-296; al-Tha'labī, 'Arā'is al-Majālis, pp. 260-293; A. Katsh, Judaism and the Koran, pp. 92-95.
4. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 29, first report, also Wajīz, pp. 26-28; Berlin 3578, f. 5a, first report; similar to al-Ṭabarī II 415, report 1662.
5. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 29-30; Berlin 3578, f. 6a; al-Qurṭubī II 42; Muqātil, Tafsīr, ff. 18a-18b.
6. E.g., al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 29, second report.
7. Al-Qurṭubī II 41-56; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 41-58; Ibn al-'Arabī I 26-32.
8. Ibn al-'Arabī I 26-27.

2/104      Oh you who believe!  
 Do not say rā'inā!  
 Say Unzurnā wa-sma'ū!  
 For those who disbelieve, there  
 will be a great punishment.

The numerous asbāb reports which are connected to this verse all attempt to answer the many questions that arise about this prohibition: Why should it not be said? Why was it said anyway?

The prohibition contained in the verse was seen, quite obviously, as applying to Muslims, so it must have been Muslims who were saying the word at one time; this assumption is reflected in all the reports. Just where, why and how the Muslims used this word is a matter of some debate, with three original contexts being suggested by the asbāb reports:

(a)      the word was Jewish, perhaps used mockingly, which the Muslims misunderstood and adopted into their speech. Al-Suyūṭī presents the following report in this vein:

When two Jewish men, Mālik ibn al-Ṣayf and Rifā'a ibn Zayd, met and talked to the prophet they would say: rā'inā sam'aka wa-sma' ghayr musma [compare Q. 4/46]. The Muslims thought that this was something that the people of the book (said) to honour their prophets. So they said that to the prophet. So God revealed... [2/104]...<sup>1</sup>

Just why it was necessary for the word to be banned is not made clear in this report; another report of al-Suyūṭī suggests simply that God "detested" the phrase.<sup>2</sup> Al-Ṭabarī's reports however state that the Jews said it "to mock" Muḥammad and thus it was banned;<sup>3</sup> the Muslims apparently did not realize that this was mockery, an observation which leads al-Ṭabarī to reject the reports since the asbāb would not have been so careless or foolish as such an oversight would suggest.<sup>4</sup>

(b) The word, in the "Jewish language" was a curse, although an innocent word in Arabic.

Al-Wāḥidī, among others, gives an extensive account of this matter:

The Arabs used to say (rā'inā) and when the Jews heard (the Muslims) saying it to the prophet they were amazed at that. Rā'inā was a severe curse in their language. They said: "We used to curse Muḥammad secretly but now they know the curse of Muḥammad because it is (also) in their speech." They used to come to the prophet and say: "Oh Muḥammad, rā'inā", and then they would laugh. One of the anṣār, Sa'd ibn 'Ubāda who knew the Jewish language, noticed it and said: "Oh enemies of God! May God's curse be on you! By him who has the soul of Muḥammad in his hand, if I hear it from anyone of you, I will break his neck!!" They said: "Have you not said it to him (yourself)?" So God revealed...[2/104]...<sup>5</sup>

The notion of a inter-lingual pun, perhaps ראה/רא "see" and ע "evil", is seen to be the reason for the prohibition.

(c) The word was a part of Arab-Jāhiliya speech. Al-Suyūṭī, among others, has the simple report that the Arabs used to say this word in the Jāhiliya and that God then prohibited its use.<sup>6</sup> No further explanation is given; the report is one more of the numerous instances of the flexibility of the motif of opposition to Muḥammad.

All these asbāb reports fulfill a basic haggadic function of providing answers for matters left unstated in the Qur'ān. But the importance of the verse goes somewhat beyond the haggadic level; for one thing, the verse is considered to be a case of abrogation by al-Naḥḥās, on the basis of the sabab.<sup>7</sup> The sabab implies for al-Naḥḥās that at one time it was permitted (mubāḥ) to say the word, then that permission was removed or abrogated. This seems significant because many other laws within the Qur'ān are not considered by al-Naḥḥās as abrogators (food

laws for example); rather the assumption seems to be these rulings confirm past practice; but here, on the basis of the sabab, prior usage is established and thus the verse enters the realm of naskh.

Even more important is the halakhic significance of the sabab. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ sees the legal significance of the verse as going beyond merely not saying rā'inā; the Jews (or the Arabs) said the word to mock others, according to the sabab--therefore mockery is not permitted; nor are double-entendres permitted (or at least, maliciously-intended ones).<sup>8</sup> The wording of the verse is extended in legal application through application of the sabab.

Finally, a terminological note is needed; al-Ṭabarī once again has the phrase اختلف اهل التاويل في السبب الذي من اجله نهى الله --what is referred to by the term sabab is not the revelation of the verse but the provocation of God, where once again the result is the same in accounting for why the verse is in the Qur'ān but the technical terminology undeveloped.<sup>9</sup> Al-Naḥḥās also uses the term sabab in his discussion but seems more interesting in punning between sabab as "cause" and sabb as "curse".<sup>10</sup> The sabab for the word being prohibited is the Jews' use of it as a sabb, according to al-Naḥḥās; the reference of sabab, as in al-Ṭabarī, is not found in the cause of revelation as such but merely in the broadly defined "circumstances".

## Notes to 2/104

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 15; also al-Ṭabarī II 460-461, reports 1728-1731 and II 462-463, report 1738.
2. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 14, fourth report.
3. Al-Ṭabarī II 460-461, reports 1728-1731; also al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 58.
4. Al-Ṭabarī II 465-466.
5. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 31 and Wajīz, p. 28; also al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 15, second report; Berlin 3578, f. 7a; al-Qurṭubī II 57; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 19a; also al-Naḥḥās, p. 26; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 32.
6. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 15, reports six and seven and perhaps three; al-Ṭabarī II 461-462, reports 1733-1737; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 58 makes the transferral Jews - Jāhiliyya complete by having the expression as one of mockery to the pagan Arabs. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 15, report five, indicates a combination of reports too: the expression was Arabic, the Jews picked it up, so God prohibited its usage; no explanation is given.
7. Al-Naḥḥās, p. 26; also see Makkī, p. 107.
8. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 58; also Ibn al-ʿArabī I 32; al-Qurṭubī II 57-60.
9. Al-Ṭabarī II 460.
10. Al-Naḥḥās, p. 26. On this verse in general see D. Künstlinger, "Rāʿinā", BSOAS, 5 (1928-1930) 877-882.

2/105 (Neither) those who disbelieve from among the  
 people of the book nor the polytheists  
 wish that there be good revealed  
 to you from your Lord.  
 But God will specify by his mercy  
 what he will. God is the possessor of  
 great beneficence.

Al-Wāḥidī and Berlin 3578 have one straight-forward report for  
 this verse, attributed by the former simply to the mufasssīrūn.

When the Muslims said to the leaders of  
 the Jews: "Believe in Muḥammad", (the Jews)  
 said: "This which you call us to has no good  
 in it from which we would gain. We would  
 certainly wish it if it were good." So  
 God revealed, contradicting them...[2/105]...<sup>1</sup>

The report is also found in Muqātil's Tafsīr, with a few minor changes,  
 where the Jews are identified as Qays ibn ʿAmr and ʿAzār ibn Yanḥūm.<sup>2</sup>  
 The exclusion of names of the polytheists<sup>3</sup> or even of including the poly-  
 theists in the confrontation is to be noted; the theme of Jewish polemic  
 is primary.

The actual report itself is a simple elaboration of the Quranic  
 verse, complete to the extent of using Quranic vocabulary: khayr,  
 good, wadd, wish; in some exegetical works, it is to be noted, these  
 words are glossed by theological conceptual equivalents (e.g., khayr =  
 Qur'ān) rather than simple linguistic synonyms. The use of this  
 exegetical technique, which is called by Wansbrough "keyword transfer",<sup>4</sup>  
 is fairly common in Islamic narrative history.



## Notes to 2/105

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 31; Berlin 3578, f. 7a.
2. Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 19a.
3. Although cf. al-Kalbī, p. 12, where mushrikūn is glossed Abū Jahl and his companions (al-Kalbī glosses the Jews as Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf and his companions).
4. SM Chapter 1.

2/106            We do not abrogate our signs/verses  
                      or cause them to be forgotten (without)  
                      bringing a better to it or the like of it.  
                      Do you not know that God has power over  
                      everything?

Considering the widespread fame and importance of this verse ,  
 the sparsity of asbāb material and the lack of unanimity in what there  
 is comes as something of a surprise.

The identification of the protagonists who provoke revelation  
 runs the entire possible range: Quraysh,<sup>1</sup> Meccan disbelievers,<sup>2</sup> poly-  
 theists<sup>3</sup> or Jews;<sup>4</sup> al-Wāḥidī and al-Qurṭubī have virtually the same  
 report except that the former identifies the group as the polytheists,  
 the latter as the Jews. The interchangeability of the groups opposing  
 Muḥammad is, once again, well illustrated.

Most of the reports point to the same charge: that Muḥammad  
 says something is permitted one day but then shortly thereafter he  
 contradicts himself. Berlin 3578 specifies the qibla change as being  
 a central matter of dispute.<sup>5</sup> Several reports point to an underlying  
 motif of the taḥaddī or challenge: the changing of the verses indicates  
 that the Qur'ān is not divine as Muḥammad claims, but rather his own  
 fallible speech.<sup>6</sup> That, in fact, the asbāb reports are of more relevance  
 to this "challenge" dispute than to halakhic disputes over modes of  
 abrogation is perhaps indicated by the fact that neither al-Jaṣṣāṣ  
 nor Ibn al-ʿArabī cite any asbāb reports<sup>7</sup> and, although al-Qurṭubī  
 cites the Jewish confrontation, his doing so does not seem to act as  
 a part of extensive discussion on the meaning of naskh (the validity and  
 necessity of which he presupposes anyway).

One indication contrary to this latter point comes, it would seem, in the solitary report found in al-Suyūṭī:

Sometimes there used to be revealed to the prophet revelation at night and he would forget it in the morning. So God revealed...[2/106]...8

This report may well indicate the presence of dispute over the notion of the possibility of abrogation in the Qur'ān; that is, the sabab may well be trying to argue that this verse refers to a revelatory process internal to Muḥammad and not to the classic modes of abrogation, that, in fact, there is no such thing as abrogation as the halakhists have conceived it.

## Notes to 2/106

1. Al-Kalbī, p. 12.
2. Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 19a.
3. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 32 and Wajīz, p. 29; Berlin 3578, f. 7a (his second report; the only text to indicate more than one possibility).
4. Al-Qurṭubī II 61; Berlin 3578, f. 7a, first report.
5. Berlin 3578, f. 7a, first report.
6. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 32; al-Qurṭubī II 61; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 19a; all use the phrase min tilqā'a nafsīhi/ka.
7. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 58-60; Ibn al-'Arabī has no section at all on the verse.
8. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 15.

2/108            Do you wish to question your prophet  
                  just as Moses was questioned before?  
                  Whoever substitutes disbelief for faith,  
                  he has strayed from the straight path.

Taking a direct approach to the verse, many asbāb reports<sup>1</sup> are cited here which picture Muḥammad being asked by the Jews and/or pagans to do something which Moses did, or at least something like what Moses did. All such confrontations are put in terms of being a test of the truth of Muḥammad's prophethood.

Most obvious is the demand made by the opponents to be allowed to see God and, in an Islamic addition, the angels; the story is, of course, parallel to the Quranic (and Biblical) account of Moses, recounted in the Qur'ān at 2/55-56.<sup>2</sup>

Further items seem to reflect miracles performed by Moses: making rivers flow<sup>3</sup> (see 2/74), making springs flow<sup>4</sup> (see 2/60), flattening the mountains near Mecca<sup>5</sup> (a development of the raising of Mount Sinai 2/63?) or an enlarging of the land of Mecca<sup>6</sup> (a reflex of the notion of the promised land?).

Demands over scripture are also prominent; 'Abd Allāb ibn Ubayy wanted a revelation which would say "From the Lord of the Worlds to Ibn Ubayy Umayya: Know that I have sent Muḥammad to the People!"<sup>7</sup> Rāfi' ibn Huraymila and Wahb ibn Zayd wanted a scripture they could recite.<sup>8</sup> Someone else (unidentified) makes the polemical parallel more explicit by demanding "a book from heaven complete (jumla) just as Moses came with the Torah".<sup>9</sup>

Another common report cites the notion of turning rocks into gold, to which Muḥammad replied "Yes, so that this may be for you just

like the table was to the Children of Israel [sic], so that you may disbelieve!"<sup>10</sup> There would seem to be a certain confusion in this report between Moses and Jesus, the latter who, according to the Qur'ān, received the request for the table from heaven (Q.5/115-117). This may well indicate a development within the context of Christian polemic where the credentials of Muḥammad's prophethood were drawn into question through comparison with Jesus. Note, however, that the account of Jesus is based on Quranic narratives rather than revealing an intimate knowledge of Christian tradition.

All these reports are obviously intended to explain the verse by making explicit the notion of "questioning" within the Quranic verse.

One final report which al-Suyūṭī quotes from al-Ṭabarī is somewhat different and seems to reflect a higher level of polemic than the mere comparison of prophetic credentials, although the relevance of the sabab to the verse may well be questioned:

A man said: "Oh prophet! If only our atonements were like those of the Children of Israel!" The prophet said: "What God has granted you is better. When one of the Children of Israel sins, he has to find (the sin) written (in the Bible or Talmud) according to his rank [alā bābihi, i.e., rank as lay/rabbi? perhaps read alā bābiḥā, according to category?] and the atonement (for the sin). So its atonement is for him a penalty in this world or, if he does not atone for it, it is for him a penalty in the hereafter. But God has given you something better than that. God said: "He who does evil or wrongs his soul and then seeks God's forgiveness, he will find God forgiving (and) merciful." [4/110] The five prayers and jum'a prayer to jum'a prayer are atonements for what (one does) between them. So God revealed...[2/108]...<sup>11</sup>

Just how this question posed to Muḥammad is like the question posed to Moses, as the Quranic verse states, is never made clear and thus the connection between the verse and the narrative remains obscure.

However, the sabab is a logical development of the other polemical motifs found for this verse and may well represent a full development of the argument. It should be noted also that the concept of "atonement" does appear in the Qur'ān, three times in reference to Muslim activity (4/89 twice, 5/95) and once in a Jewish context (5/45):

We decreed upon (the Jews) a life  
for a life, an eye for an eye...but  
the remittance of retaliation and making  
it an act of charity, that is an atonement  
for him.

The concept of Jewish atonement for individual sins is certainly not elaborated in the Qur'ān and the understanding exhibited in the sabab indicates an evolved position.

A terminological note must be made here; al-Ṭabarī introduces his discussion of the verse اختلف اهل التاويل في السبب من اجله انزلت هذه <sup>12</sup>. We have here the term sabab used by al-Ṭabarī for the first time in this study in the context of nazala, that is, in its (later-to-be) technical sense. Al-Ṭabarī still finds it necessary to explain "the sabab on account of which this verse was revealed"; the implications of the term sabab in and by itself are obviously not yet fully established, nor, it may be added, are the criteria that define the term later on—one of al-Ṭabarī's reports <sup>13</sup> is simply the statement "Moses was asked, it being said to him 'Show us God clearly!'" <sup>14</sup>.

## Notes to 2/108

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, pp. 15-16 combines the reports for verses 108 and 109; within the five reports which he gives, however, numbers 1, 3, 4 and 5, deal with verse 108 and only number 2 deals with verse 109. I have therefore treated the verses separately as do al-Wāḥidī and Berlin 3578.
2. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 32, first report, second report; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 16, fourth report; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 19b; al-Kalbī, p. 12; al-Qurṭubī II 70, first report; al-Ṭabarī II 490, reports 1778, 1779.
3. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 32, last part, first report; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 15, last part, first report; al-Qurṭubī II 70, last part, third report; al-Ṭabarī II 490, last part of report 1777 equals end of Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 548.
4. Berlin 3578, f. 7a, second part, third report.
5. Berlin 3578, f. 7a, last part, third report.
6. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 32, second part, second report and Wajīz, p. 29, equals Berlin 3578, ff. 7a-7b, fourth report.
7. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 32, second part, second report equals Berlin 3578, ff. 7a-7b, fourth report.
8. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 15, first part, first report; Berlin 3578, f. 7a, second report; al-Qurṭubī II 70, first part, third report; al-Ṭabarī II 489-490, first part of report 1777 equals beginning of Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 548.
9. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 32, first part, second report; see QS 36.
10. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, pp. 15-16, third report; al-Ṭabarī II 490-491, reports 1780-1782, all from Mujāhid, pp. 85-86. The basic notion of turning rocks into gold is also in al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 32, first part, first report and Wajīz, p. 29; Berlin 3578, f. 7a, first part, first report; al-Qurṭubī II 70, second report.
11. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 16, fifth report; al-Ṭabarī II 491, report 1783 somewhat more extensive.
12. Al-Ṭabarī II 489.
13. II 490, report 1778.
14. On the verse as a whole see A. Katsh, Judaism and the Koran, p. 97, where attempts are made to find Biblical props for disputation with Moses (e.g., Numbers 16 with Korah). The Muslim exegetes are far more imaginative!



2/109

Many of the people of the book  
 wish that they were able to  
 turn you back to disbelief after  
 you have believed, envious in their  
 very souls, even after the truth  
 has been revealed to them.  
 Forgive and pardon until God  
 accomplishes his command.  
 God is powerful over all things.

Diversity marks the asbāb reports for this verse, but all of them do act to explicate the notion of Jewish "envy" of Islam and the notion of the desire of the Jews to produce apostates from Islam, the whole report thus providing interpretation of the verse in narrative form.

A basic report is found in al-Suyūṭī, taken from Ibn Ishāq:

Ḥuyayy ibn Akḥṭab and his brother Abū Yāsar ibn Akḥṭab were the most envious of the Jews towards the Arabs when God favoured (the Arabs) with his prophet. The two of them exerted themselves (trying) to turn the people from Islam by whatever means possible [bimā istaṭāʿā]. So God revealed about them...[2/109]...<sub>1</sub>

A second report, found in basic form in al-Wāḥidī, expanded somewhat in al-ʿIraqī (with details corroborating this report in al-Kalbī) and most extensively in Muqātil's Tafsīr, focuses the dispute over the relative merits of the two religions, Judaism and Islam, being meant to expose, it would seem, Jewish "hypocrisy" resulting from their "envy". Al-Wāḥidī sums the matter up this way:

(The verse) was revealed about a group of Jews who said to the Muslims after the battle of Uhud: "Do you not realize what has befallen you!? If you had the truth, you would not have been defeated! So return to our faith; it will be better for you!"<sub>2</sub>

Polemical charges of lack of worldly/military success are, of course, a constant in Near Eastern religious debate (e.g., discussion of the destruction of the Temple) and indicate that the interpretation of this verse continues within the pattern established in earlier parts of this sūra. That the anonymous group of Jews in al-Wāḥidī's report are identified by name along with their Muslim targets within the other versions of this same plot reveals perhaps a lesser concern on al-Wāḥidī's part for the haggadic element over against the exegetical constituent.

Another report in al-Wāḥidī, paralleled in Berlin 3578, centres around the person of Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf (also named in al-Kalbī) and his poetical powers.<sup>3</sup>

Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf was a poet who used to mock the prophet and provoke the Qurayshī disbelievers against (Muḥammad) by his poetry. When the prophet heard (the poetry) the polytheists and the Medinan Jews greatly annoyed the prophet and his companions. But God ordered his prophet to have patience in this and forgive them; so this verse was revealed about them.<sup>4</sup>

Al-Ṭabarī, too, puts forth the identification of the protagonist as Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf<sup>5</sup> but then goes on to argue that this cannot be true because Kaʿb "is one person and God has said that many of them would love it if they could turn the believers back to disbelief after they had faith". The text, al-Ṭabarī continues, indicates that it means "many" in number not power or status. This leads him once again to a significant statement of exegetical method:

If the words are to have a certain meaning, it is necessary that there be some sort of indication [dalāla] that that is their meaning.

There is no such indication in the verse: "many of the ahl al-Kitāb wish..." that would indicate the meaning of "one" rather than a multiplicity. It would (however) be possible to change the interpretation of the verse to that notion (of "one") by means of a report with an indication of its apparent meaning [zāhir] which is other than what predominates in practice.<sup>6</sup>

We have here, it would seem, a concept of a meaning in the text that "predominates in practice" al-ghālib fī'l-isti'māl, that is, is the authoritative meaning, which could be overridden by a clear report--a sabab or an identification (although this latter al-Ṭabarī obviously feels is insufficient in this specific case); such reports do not, however, take precedence over the established/authoritative meaning (elsewhere called the zāhir).

There is, however, another element present in the report of al-Wāḥidī, and that is the notion that God ordered Muḥammad to forgive Ka'b and have patience. Thus, for the first time in the asbāb reports for this verse, the latter part of the verse is being explained. As a consequence, at least for the serious reader, there is a halakhic point raised here: has God yet accomplished his command so that forgiveness and pardon may be replaced by something else? And, if so, what are they replaced by? It is significant to note, and the ahkām texts bear out the point, that the sabab as presented by al-Wāḥidī seems to have no bearing on this legal point. The fact that Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf is killed as a result of his poetry-writing is not mentioned in the report and it is hard to avoid the impression that the point of the sabab, as a result, is not halakhic but haggadic.

That, of course, God's command has been fulfilled was obvious to every exegete, and, thus, in halakhic discussions the requirements of the verse to have patience and be forgiving, are abrogated. Al-Jassās, al-Nahās, Hibat Allāh, al-Qurtubī and al-Tabarī<sup>7</sup> all agree that the verse is abrogated, either by Q. 9/29 or 9/5, both of which allow the "polytheists" or "those who do not believe" to be killed.

Al-Qurtubī adds a level of sophistication to the discussion by relating an extensive ḥadīth from al-Bukhārī and Muslim.<sup>8</sup> In the tradition 'Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy was jealous of the prophet and opposed to him because of his power. Muḥammad, however, excused him for his antagonism as God had ordered when he sent down Q. 3/186 and 2/109. The tradition goes on to make the matter of abrogation explicit: "The prophet continued to cling to forgiveness as God ordered him, until God gave permission (to fight) them." The role of this ḥadīth then, is to establish this supersession of the legal ruling, but not, note, to connect the event with the revelation of the verse; Muḥammad acted as God had said (qāla allāh), but the connection of the two elements through the phrase fa anzala allāh is not made.

## Notes to 2/109

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 15; equals al-Ṭabarī II 499, report 1788; equals Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 548. Al-Suyūṭī's report is the second found in his series for verses 108-109.
2. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 32, first report and Wajīz, p. 29. Also see al-ʿIrāqī, f. 2b; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 19b; al-Kalbī, p. 12.
3. See Ibn Ishāq, Sīra II 51-58 for Ka'b's poetry and final downfall.
4. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 32-33, second report; Berlin 3578, f. 7b.
5. Al-Ṭabarī II 499, reports 1786, 1787.
6. Al-Ṭabarī II 500.
7. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 60; al-Naḥḥās, pp. 26-27; Hibat Allāh, p. 12; al-Qurṭubī II 71-73; al-Ṭabarī II 503-504, reports 1796-1800.
8. Al-Qurṭubī II 72-73; al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Tafsīr VI 70-72.

2/113

The Jews say: "The Christians have nothing" and the Christians say: "The Jews have nothing", while they both recite the book. Similarly those who do not know say the like of their saying. God will judge between them on the day of the resurrection in that which they have disputed.

The report as to the occasion of revelation for this verse gains virtual unanimity among the exegetes; it is a typical example of a minimal sabab formed around a variation of the actual Quranic statement in order to provide an appropriate context and setting for the verse. It pictures Muḥammad as a focal point for Arabian Jewish-Christian polemic such that the debate is brought before him in a form of public dispute.

The basic form of the sabab is found in Ibn Ishāq and has been analysed by Wansbrough in the context of that work.<sup>1</sup> The passage reads:

When the Christians of Najrān came to the prophet, the Jewish rabbis came to them and they disputed between themselves before the Prophet. Rāfi' ibn Ḥuraymila said: "You have nothing" and he denied Jesus and the Gospel; a man from the Christians said to the Jews: "You have nothing" and he denied the prophethood of Moses and denied the Torah. So God revealed about them...[2/113]...<sup>2</sup>

The identical report is given by al-Suyūṭī,<sup>3</sup> while al-Wāḥidī gives a version of the story in which the name of the Jewish protagonist is omitted but there is added the idea that, rather than disputing merely over this one point, they disputed "until their voices disappeared".<sup>4</sup>

As will be seen below, this sabab also serves to establish part of the interpretational context of the Quranic pericope, an exegetical element which acts as a decisive factor for some exegetes in the interpretation of the following verses.

## Notes to 2/113

1. SM 17.
2. Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 549.
3. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 16, the name is given there as Ibn Khuzayma; also al-Ṭabarī II 513-514, report 1811.
4. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 33 and Wajīz, p. 30; also see Berlin 3578, f. 7b; al-Qurṭubī II 76; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 20a.

2/114

And who is more unjust then he who  
 prevents in mosques of God the mentioning  
 of his name and attempts to destroy them?  
 It is not allowable to them that they  
 enter them except in fear.  
 For them is humiliation in the world and  
 for them is an extreme torment in the hereafter.

This typically "neutral" statement of the Qur'ān has been subject to widely varying interpretations based, in part, upon asbāb material. The basic problem in interpretation of the verse revolves around the context in which the verse is conceived to fit: either following verse 113 (see above) and its Jewish-Christian polemic, or as introducing verse 115 (see below) itself subject to varying interpretations, either as a part of the sectarian (Judaean-Christian-Muslim) qibla conflict (thus forming a unity with verse 113) or as referring purely to the Arabian context. Radically different asbāb are suggested in the sources to make the verse fit each of these contexts.

The Arabian context is produced by a sabab stating that the reference is to the polytheists of Mecca when they intercepted the Prophet and those wishing to pray and turned them away from the Ka'ba. This happened in the year of Ḥudaybiya (the year 6) according to al-Qurṭubī.<sup>1</sup> A consistent interpretation of the entire verse is then provided.<sup>2</sup>

Al-Qurṭubī provides three alternate identifications of the protagonists within the Jewish-Christian polemical framework. The basic form, transmitted from Ibn 'Abbās and others, is simply that the reference is to the Christians. This is given a narrative form by al-Qurṭubī:

It was revealed about the Christians and the meaning is: "How can you allege, Oh Christians, that you are the people of paradise?! You destroyed the Temple of Jerusalem and prevented those wishing to pray there from praying." <sub>3</sub>



The two other asbāb involve identification of historically-past personages and thus reveal the wide scope of the idea nazalat fī and sabab, since in no sense are these people the actual 'cause' of revelation at that historical moment. One version, the first alternative of al-Wāḥidī but seemingly adduced merely as an alternate name to the following version by al-Qurṭubī,<sup>4</sup> attributes the action to Ṭaṭūs<sup>5</sup> ibn Isbīsānūs al-Rūmī and his Christian helpers. The crimes included are killing Jews, capturing children, burning the Torah, destroying the Temple (bayt al-muqaddas) and desecrating the sacred territory.<sup>6</sup> The other version, given prominence by al-Qurṭubī, identifies the leader as Bukhtnaṣṣar al-Bābilī al-Majūsī with the Christians as his assistants.<sup>7</sup> The figure of Bukhtnaṣṣar is clearly to be identified with the Biblical Nebuchadnezzar<sup>8</sup> due to his role in the qisṣa al-anbiyā';<sup>9</sup> the historical problem of having Christians help a figure who lived six centuries before the birth of Jesus raised a variety of reactions from the exegetes. To al-Qurṭubī the problem seems to be insignificant; it may be, however, that the final statement in the report of Qatāda as recorded by al-Qurṭubī, "the destruction lasted until the time of 'Umar" was supposed to suggest that the aid of the Christians was not necessarily historically co-incident with the destruction by Bukhtnaṣṣar.<sup>10</sup> Such a statement is explicit in al-Ṭabarī, who favours the Bukhtnaṣṣar interpretation overall.<sup>11</sup> The Christians, al-Ṭabarī states, aided the destruction only after Bukhtnaṣṣar's return home.<sup>12</sup> Al-Wāḥidī, it should be added, stays true to his pattern, and expresses none of his own feelings on the subject.<sup>13</sup>

The reason for al-Qurṭubī's historical neglect is, however, clear; in his comments on the verse he clearly favours the solution of rejecting all the asbāb and opting for the interpretation: "the intention [of the verse] is he who is prevented from entering any mosque until the day of resurrection. This is sound because the wording is general as indicated by the pattern of the plural [i.e. masājid]". This interpretation is, in fact, a virtual quote, even though introduced by wa qīla, from Ibn al-ʿArabī who also adduces, very tersely, the various asbāb and agrees with al-Qurṭubī that the asbāb are merely examples, both real as in the case of Bukhtnassar, and metaphorical [maḥāz] as in the case of Meccans.<sup>14</sup> Clearly for both these writers it is the legal and moral point of scripture that is important and traditional interpretations along with the context can be put aside in order to make the legal point: to deny access to any mosque, whether in Jerusalem, Mecca or anywhere else is a crime; the sabab cannot limit the ruling.<sup>15</sup> In fact, the verse is used by al-Qurṭubī to make many more wide-reaching legal points:<sup>16</sup> about building mosques, about the mosque during the ḥajj and women, and the general importance of prayer. But even if the verse had a specific applicable sabab, it would not be allowed to overrule the general legal import of the verse.

At this point it is worth examining al-Qurṭubī's attitude to the context a bit more closely. In 2/113 he accepts the Jewish-Christian polemical encounter for the first half of the verse but then defines "those who do not know" in the latter part of the verse as the pagan Arabs.<sup>17</sup> Now in 2/114 he has switched to a general meaning, not

related to the previous context at all. This change can be profitably compared with al-Ṭabarī's treatment, where attempts are made to maintain a constant context: 2/113 "those who do not know" are defined as "any ignorant community", that is, as a general statement, which is probably the closest any exegete could come to maintaining the theme of Jewish-Christian polemic in the whole verse.<sup>18</sup> In 2/114 al-Ṭabarī rejects the Meccan sabab on the grounds that they were not "zealous" in their desire to destroy the Ka'ba<sup>19</sup> and on the basis of an extensive argument concerning the context.<sup>20</sup> As noted above, al-Ṭabarī favours the Bukhtnaṣṣar sabab for this verse. Clearly, the narrative impact of the Qur'ān is of greater importance to al-Ṭabarī than to al-Qurṭubī, who despite his "midrashic"-style of exegesis<sup>21</sup> often allows the status of the Qur'ān as a source of law to overrule any haggadic element the Qur'ān may contain at any given point.

The historical neglect exhibited by al-Qurṭubī is not however true of all the halakhic exegetes. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ<sup>22</sup> describes the report of Qatāda connecting Bukhtnaṣṣar and the Christians as an error (ghalaṭ) in transmission:

because there is no disagreement among ahl al-ilm about the reports of the ancestors [awwalūn] that the era of Bukhtnaṣṣar was before the birth of the Messiah by a great length of time and the Christians came after the Messiah and are dependent on him. So, how could they be associated with Bukhtnaṣṣar in the destruction of the Temple? The Christians spread their religion in Syria and Byzantium in the days of Constantine the King [Qusṭanṭīn] and that was 200 years before Islam.

With such an understanding, al-Jaṣṣāṣ avoids allowing the sabab to limit the legal ramifications of the verse by simply adducing

his rule "nothing is made specific without an indication thereof"  
 [lā yakhussu shay' minhu illā bi dalāla]<sup>23</sup> but it is worthy of note  
 that this does not affect al-Jassās' understanding of the intent  
 of the verse; one may well suggest that al-Jassās is aware of two levels  
 of the Qur'ān: one haggadic, the other halakhic.

Finally, it must be said that in general the halakhists seem  
 prepared to accept a neutral or non-specific statement of the Qur'ān  
 and leave it at that, drawing the necessary legal rulings from that very  
 generality. Such a procedure was not satisfactory at the level of  
 narrative exegesis where asbāb al-nuzul originated--neutral references  
 were made relevant through identification in order to provide a consistent  
 narrative story. The context was the ruling factor and the method of  
asbāb flexible enough to fit the desired context, be it as in this case,  
 Arabia, ancient history or contemporary Christian-Jewish polemic.

## Notes to 2/114

1. Al-Qurtubī II 77; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 33; al-Jassās I 61; al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, p. 34, last of 3 terse reports, not dated to Ḥudaybiya; Berlin 3578, f. 7b, last two of 3 reports; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 16, two reports, the only interpretation given for the verse; al-Ṭabarī II 521-524, report 1826; the reports seems not to be found in the accounts of Ḥudaybiya by al-Wāqidī or Ibn Ishāq.
2. E.g., al-Qurtubī II 77-79; the pagan Meccans will fear to enter the Kaʿba, actually to the point that they will no longer be permitted to enter or circumambulate (see Q. 9/28); their fate in the world and the hereafter is as predicted in the verse.
3. Al-Qurtubī II 77; also see al-Jassās I 61, from Mujāhid; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 33, second report; al-Ṭabarī II 520, reports 1820-1822; Mujāhid, p. 86 equals al-Ṭabarī 1821/1822; al-Wāhidī, Wajīz, p. 30; all these latter are minus the narrative element of al-Qurtubī. The rest of the verse is interpreted in line with this sabab; see e.g., al-Qurtubī II 77-79: after ʿUmar rebuilt the Temple, the Christians could enter only if they were physically struck, so that they could enter only "in fear" and so forth, with the interpretation of "this world" and "the hereafter" in terms of the Christians (and the Byzantines).
4. There would appear to be no historical separation in the mind of al-Qurtubī between the two alternatives, just variant names: Naṭūs and Bukhtnaṣṣar; cf. also Berlin 3578, f. 7b, first report where Bukhtnaṣṣar is the "companion" of Ṭanṭūs [sic - see below].
5. The spelling varies; al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, p. 33, Ṭaṭūs; other editions of al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, give Ṭaṭlūs; al-Qurtubī II 77, Naṭūs with a footnote giving reference to other manuscripts and their readings Baṭūs and Taṭūs; Berlin 3578, f. 7b, Ṭanṭūs; al-Kalbī, p. 13, Taṭūs (ibn Isyibānūs: although this may be a misprint; other editions have Isbiyānūs); all undoubtedly refer to Titus Flavius Vespasianus, the Roman leader connected with the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE.
6. Al-Qurtubī II 77; al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, p. 33, his first report; Berlin 3578, f. 7b, first report; note the gloss of al-Kalbī, p. 13 where Titus is "King of the Christians". Also see Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 20a.
7. Al-Qurtubī II 77; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 33; al-Jassās I 61; al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, p. 34, second report; al-Ṭabarī II 520-521, reports 1823-1825.

8. The destroyer of the Temple in Jerusalem in 586 BCE.
9. See Jan Pauling, "Islamische Legende über Buhtnaṣṣar (Nebukadnezar)", *Graecolatine et Orientalia* IV (1972) 161-183. Bukhtnaṣṣar is normally connected with Q. 17/4 ff; see Pauling, pp. 168-170, for an examination of al-Ṭabarī's comments on it; note that al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb*, has no reports for 17/5. Al-Tha'labī, 'Arā'is al-Majālis, pp. 293-310 connects to the prophet Daniel (cf. Dan. 4) details of the legendary exploits of Bukhtnaṣṣar; see also Pauling, pp. 171-179. See the EI<sup>1</sup> and EI<sup>2</sup> articles "Bukht-Naṣar"/"Bukht-Naṣ(ṣ)ar"; Vadjā notes in the EI<sup>2</sup> article that Bukhtnaṣṣar according to Islamic legend, "was tormented to death by a mosquito which got into his skull, this being a transfer of the rabbinical legend about Titus, the destroyer of the Second Temple", a transfer which obviously goes much further than merely the story of his death! Vadjā also mentions that Bukhtnaṣṣar is connected to Q. 31/11ff, but I can find no trace of such a connection; perhaps it is an error for 17/5ff. The figure of Bukhtnaṣṣar is put into further disarray by having him connected with the story of John the Baptist and/or his father Zachariah, a confusion apparently with the Biblical prophet Zachariah: See Heller's article "Zarakīya", EI<sup>1</sup>.
10. Al-Qurṭubī II 77; also see al-Kalbī, p. 13; Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, f. 20a.
11. See below at note 20.
12. Al-Ṭabarī II 521-522.
13. Al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb*, pp. 33-34.
14. Al-Qurṭubī II 77; Ibn al-'Arabī I 33.
15. The rest of the verse is interpreted to fit this idea: Jihād must be constant against the enemy so that none of them may enter any mosque without fearing, and so forth.
16. Al-Qurṭubī II 78-79.
17. See above pp. 178-179; al-Qurṭubī II 76.
18. Al-Ṭabarī II 516-517.
19. An idea rejected by al-Qurṭubī II 77 on the grounds that the sabab is to be understood as ma'jāz, metaphorical.
20. Al-Ṭabarī II 522-524.

21. See QS 201 note 4.
22. Al-Jassās I 61.
23. Al-Jassās I 61 and QS 185; this would appear to be a formula for al-Jassās; also see ad 2/159 below.

2/115            To God belong the East and the West;  
                   Wherever you turn, the face of God is there.  
                   Indeed, God is Omnipresent, All-knowing.

While a fair proportion of Western literature on the subject has tended to assume that this verse is related to the qibla controversy,<sup>1</sup> the Muslim consensus, as expressed in tafsīr, ahkām and naskh works, has tended, for the most part, to reject such a possibility as indicated by their preference for other explanations. This rejection (or occasional acceptance) has always taken place for Muslim exegetes on the basis of the asbāb al-nuzūl connected with the verse for it is the sabab which embodies the context around which the verse is to be interpreted.

But even if the relationship of the verse to the change of qibla was not evident to the exegetes, the idea that the verse was related to the actual direction of prayer was clear enough. It is therefore worth keeping in mind two assumed facts with which all Muslim exegetes approach the topic as a whole:

1.        that the present qibla is the Ka'ba and that scriptural props can be found to support that direction;
2.        that there would, indeed, appear to be an indication in the Qur'ān of a change in the direction of prayer.

The exact scriptural explication of the latter point was never unanimous, nor indeed were the steps involved in the change of qibla. The disputes over these facets have left their trace in the asbāb al-nuzūl to be found for this verse, before the consensus of opinion rejected such an interpretation of the verse. Indeed, this verse manifests one of the largest and most diverse collections of asbāb al-nuzūl to be treated in this study.



The sabab which received the most general assent over the centuries related the interpretation of the verse to "misdirected" prayers; implicit here is that the direction of prayer was known at the historical moment of the anecdote and revelation, be it Mecca or Jerusalem, and that the change of qibla was irrelevant to the verse.

Among early works, al-Kalbī glosses "To God are the East and the West" as "the qibla for those who do not know the qibla" and explains "the face of God is there" with the following anecdote.

It was revealed [nazalat fī] about lookouts from among the Companions of the Prophet who prayed, while on a journey, to other than the qibla after having searched (for the correct qibla).<sup>2</sup>

Within the context of legal discussions of the qibla, Muqātil gives a somewhat more elaborate story, preceded, it is to be noted, by a chronological discussion of the change of qibla of the type usually connected with 2/143. The scene is thus set for the anecdote being a post-qibla controversy:

Some of the Muslims were on a journey; when the time of prayer approached they sought the qibla. Some among them prayed to the west, some to the east. Then it became clear to them that they had prayed to other than the qibla. So when they arrived in Medina, they asked the prophet and...[2/115]... was revealed.<sup>3</sup>

The direct descendants of the reports from al-Kalbī and Muqātil as found in later works including the asbāb texts are all more extensive in narrative form and are formed with the following six major elements, with minor variations:

1. travelling either with or without the Prophet;
2. the travellers stop at the time for prayer;
3. it is cloudy, dark or foggy and the qibla cannot be determined;
4. everyone prays towards the direction he thinks best;
5. next morning the error becomes clear;
6. the Prophet is asked about it, the verse is revealed.<sup>4</sup>

The elaborations evidenced in these reports all make more plain the halakhic point of the anecdote: that prayer was legally valid, if, out of ignorance, the qibla was not faced. This was the generally accepted ruling among the madhāhib, according to al-Qurṭubī, the exceptions being al-Shāfi'ī and al-Mughīra who considered the qibla a shart, i.e., a part of the obligation of prayer.<sup>5</sup> Thus this sabab is halakhically relevant and, by establishing the appropriate context for interpretation, serves to pose the halakhic problem for which the answer is given by scripture; that is, the problem of an und<sup>te</sup>terminable qibla is posed and, through the interpretational means of a sabab, a passage of the Qur'ān is seen to be relevant.

This being the case, one can only express a certain amount of surprise at finding an alternate sabab for the verse with its own halakhic point to make, the legal implications of which are accepted in combination with those of the previous sabab. The basic sabab is terse but manages to pose the problem of what to do if one is riding a camel at prayer-time--is it necessary to dismount or may one ride and pray in the direction the camel is facing? The narrative finds its earliest literary source not in exegesis as such but in ḥadīth literature.

An analysis of the various hadiths related to this verse illustrates a feature of that literature not often studied. An examination of the eleven reports found in Muslim, a representative source as well as the authority often quoted in connection with this verse in later works,<sup>6</sup> reveals the following series of traditions, somewhat re-arranged:<sup>7</sup>

No. 2 from Ibn 'Umar:

The Prophet used to pray on his camel  
in whatever direction it pointed him.

No. 7 from Ibn 'Umar:

--as in no. 2--but plus: Ibn 'Umar  
used to do it.

No. 5 from Ibn 'Umar:

I saw the Prophet praying on a donkey  
while facing Khaybar.

No. 11 from Anas ibn Sirīn:

We met Anas ibn Mālik when he returned  
from Syria at 'Ayn al-Tamr. I saw him  
praying on his donkey facing that  
direction (narrator points to the left  
of the gibla). I said to him: "I see you  
praying to other than the gibla." He  
said: "Had I not seen the Prophet do it,  
I would not do it!"

No. 1 from Ibn 'Umar:

The Prophet used to pray his supererogatory  
prayers (subha) in whatever direction his  
camel faced him.

No. 10 from Abū Ibn Rabi'a:

He had seen the prophet pray the  
supererogatory prayers at night while  
on a journey on the back of his camel  
in whatever direction it pointed.

No. 8 from Ibn ʿUmar:

The Prophet used to pray the witr prayer<sup>8</sup> on his camel.

No. 6 from Saʿīd ibn Yasār:

I was travelling with Ibn ʿUmar on the road to Mecca. When I feared morning (was approaching), I dismounted and prayed the witr prayer and then caught up with him. Ibn ʿUmar said to me: "Where have you been?" I said to him: "I feared dawn (was approaching) so I dismounted and prayed the witr prayer." So ʿAbd Allāh (Ibn ʿUmar) said: "Is there not in the Prophet an example [uswa] for you?" I said: "Indeed, there is by God!" He said: "Indeed the Prophet prayed the witr prayer on his camel."

No. 9 from Sālim ibn ʿAbd Allāh:

The Prophet used to pray supererogatory prayers on his camel toward whatever direction it faced and he prayed the witr prayer on it, although he did not pray the prescribed prayers on it.

No. 3 from Ibn ʿUmar:

The Prophet used to pray while going from Mecca to Medina on his camel in whatever direction it pointed. He said "Concerning this was revealed...[2/115]..."

No. 4 from Ibn ʿUmar:

- as in no. 3 but two additional isnāds -

This collection of ḥadīth exhibits many of the features common to this type of literature: multiple reports from one authority varying in small details which are supposed to suggest more intimate knowledge of the alleged events (e.g., "I saw...", "I met...") and extended narrative stories defining historical locale and time but adding no relevant facts. More significant in this instance are the additions made for halakhic purposes; an analysis of the groups of ḥadīth reveals the following:

- (a) Numbers 2, 7, 5 and 11 are all halakhically undeveloped; 2 states the basic point, 7 that the practice establishes a sunna, 5 adds a historical locale plus the personal witness "I saw", 11 combines the features of 7 and 5 and adds the narrative element.
- (b) Numbers 1, 10, 8, 6 and 9 all add the halakhic point that the incident relates specifically to supererogatory prayers; 1 just adds the fact of the subḥa prayer, 10 adds further definition by making it the night supererogatory prayer, 8 defines the supererogatory prayers as the witr prayer, 6 elaborates the point further by the narrative element, involving personal witness and the concept of sunna, 9 names both subḥa and witr prayer and makes explicit the halakhic point that the anecdote does not apply to the regular five prayers.
- (c) Number 3 and 4 take the underdeveloped ḥadīth and make it into the form of a sabab and add the historical locale of the journey from Mecca to Medina.

A further group (d) is lacking in these reports in Muslim but is found, for example, in al-Tirmidhī where the sabab report is linked with the idea of the supererogatory prayers.<sup>9</sup> One may well postulate a chronological development in these reports from group (a) to (b) to (c) and (d). The adding of the more explicit halakhic point comes first, then is added the scriptural prop investing the legal ruling with more authority. It may be stating the obvious but it is to be noted that what is involved here is not a development from the most simple to the most complex report, but rather from halakhic naïveté to explicit statement of halakhic purpose joined with scriptural prop. The development is most easily conceived of as occurring under the pressure of an existing law looking for a prop in

sunna and scripture.<sup>10</sup> That prop is found in the concept of a sabab which combines both elements.

That being the case, the verse becomes the point of departure for the exegetes to make halakhic derivations.<sup>11</sup> The sabab is used to support the notion that supererogatory prayers may be said while riding, regardless of the direction faced.<sup>12</sup> Al-Qurtubī also uses the verse as an occasion to deal with an analogous situation<sup>13</sup> of those who are sick and being carried. Al-Ṭabarī also considers this verse as related to the "prayer of fear", normally attached to Q. 2/239 and 4/101-104;<sup>14</sup> whether this is because of the possible allusion to Muhammad's journey from Mecca to Medina, i.e., the hijra, as found in Muslim's version of the sabab is never made clear. It should be noted that in fact al-Ṭabarī adduces the sabab as found in al-Tirmidhī (i.e., stage (d) above) not as in Muslim. Once again, the law is known by al-Ṭabarī; what he searches for are the appropriate moments to connect it with scripture.

The fact that these two separate halakhic points, i.e., of prayer to other than the qibla due to (i) dark and/or (ii) riding, the latter restricted to supererogatory prayer, were connected by totally different asbāb al-nuzūl to one verse of scripture created no embarrassment for those Muslim exegetes concerned.<sup>15</sup> Such a procedure could easily be incorporated within the flexible theory of the sabab; as noted in Chapter II of this thesis, any given verse could have been revealed on more than one occasion. The need for such a provision is apparent in a case such as this.

Al-Ṭabarī complicates matters further by opting for a general meaning to the verse but he still manages to accept the

possibility of the validity of all the halakhic implications of these asbāb. It would appear that al-Ṭabarī can reconcile an exegetical ma'nā in the ʿāmm along with a halakhic interpretation in the khāṣṣ; indeed he argues for the possibility that the verse was revealed in the general sense but had, and has, several specific applications.<sup>16</sup>

In quite a different vein comes the third sabab for this verse; it, too, according to some has its halakhic point to make although it is also subject to resolute rejection. The theme concerns the death of the Najāshī, the Ethiopian king, named Aṣḥama or Aḥama ibn Abḥar and Muḥammad's call for a prayer for him. The simplest report is found always attributed to Qatāda:

The Prophet said: "Indeed our brother the Najāshī has died, so pray for him!" They said: "Should we pray for a man who was not a Muslim?!" So "Among the People of the Book are some who believe in God and what has been revealed to you and what has been revealed to them, humbling themselves to God" [3/199] was revealed. So they said: "But he did not pray toward the qibla." So God revealed...[2/115]... 17

A variant on this, found only in al-Wāḥidī and Berlin 3578<sup>18</sup> and attributed to 'Atā', adds the idea of Gabriel communicating the death to Muḥammad, removes the revelation of 3/199 and makes explicit that the Najāshī had prayed always to Jerusalem and had not been informed of the change of qibla to the Ka'ba.<sup>19</sup>

Significant in these reports is the use of qibla as a sectarian emblem. The Najāshī is not a Muslim, the claim is, purely because he did not pray to the correct qibla. Such a dispute is reminiscent of the stories of the encounter of Salmān al-Fārisī<sup>20</sup> with Muḥammad and the search for the defining criteria of the Muslim sect; it is, as well,

an extension of the employment of the figure of the Najāshī in the defining of Islam as in the stories of his conversion.<sup>21</sup> That the story fulfils a polemical rather than a historical function is further confirmed by the fact that tradition assigns the death of the Najāshī to Ramaḍān or Rajab of the year 9 hijrī.<sup>22</sup> This, one may have thought, would have in itself created grave difficulties over the sabab, the sūra being generally considered as "early Medinan" but al-Qurṭubī, at least, is quite prepared to mention the date of the death of the King and leave it at that.

The reason for al-Qurṭubī's lack of concern over this matter is undoubtedly that he is taking the Qur'ān not on a historical nor even a polemical level but on a halakhic one. The sabab is an occasion for him to be able to discuss the idea of the permissibility of prayer for an absent person [ghā'ib] as accepted by al-Shāfi'ī even though it is ultimately rejected by al-Qurṭubī himself.<sup>23</sup> That rejection was even more firm in al-Suyūṭī who rejects the sabab itself out-of-hand as gharīb jidd<sup>an</sup>, extremely strange, and the isnād is judged mursal, minus the last element, or mu'dil, minus the last two (or more) consecutive elements.<sup>24</sup>

In the fourth different sabab for this verse, the focus of revelation is switched back to the Jews of the previous verse 2/114 and located historically once again as a post-qibla change. A number of variant reports is found within the general theme, the following one from al-Qurṭubī being given on the authority of Ibn Zayd:

The Jews approved [istahsanat] of the prayer of the prophet toward the temple of Jerusalem and they said: "He is not guided by anyone



except by us." So when he turned to the Ka'ba, the Jews said: "What has turned them from their qibla which was imposed upon them?" [2/142]. So...[2/115]...was revealed.<sup>25</sup>

Al-Tabarī gives one report, via two isnāds, which is worthy of note:

The first thing abrogated from the Qur'ān was the qibla, that was that God ordered the prophet, when he fled to Medina where most of the inhabitants were Jews, to pray toward the temple of Jerusalem. The Jews rejoiced [faribat] at this. So the prophet prayed toward it for over ten months, all the time longing for the qibla of Abraham. He called and gazed into the sky. So God revealed: "We have seen you turning your face in the heavens...turn your face in the direction of the holy mosque and wherever you are, turn you faces in its direction." [2/144] The Jews had doubts [irtāba] about that and they said: "What has turned them from their qibla which was imposed upon them?" [2/142], so God revealed...[2/115]...<sup>26</sup>

The most notable feature of these reports is the suggestion that the Jews approved of the Jerusalem qibla and were not pleased<sup>27</sup> at the change to the Ka'ba. These reports, therefore, simply continue to polemic motif of Jewish "envy" towards Islam and its prophet.<sup>28</sup>

A clue to the intent of these reports comes in the following version of the sabab recorded by Hibat Allāh and al-'Irāqī:

The Jews said after the change of qibla:  
 "Muḥammad is not lacking [lā yakhlū]  
 (one of these) two things: Either that it  
 [the former qibla] used to be true and he  
 withdrew from it or that it was false so it  
 was not appropriate that it be incumbent  
 (in the first place)". So God revealed...[2/115]...<sup>29</sup>

Clearly, I think, the Jews here are not being put in the position of arguing about the qibla as such, but about the very principle of

abrogation which lies behind the supposed change in the direction of prayer. The key element of the Jewish position on this matter in contemporary (i.e., 8th century CE.) polemic with Christians and Muslims is given in the representation of their arguments in the above sabab: the logical impossibility of abrogation. For the Jews, to admit the possibility of abrogation was to allow the possibility of the abrogation of the Mosaic law which was to argue against the continued validity of Judaism. The Muslim counter-argument was embodied in the concept of naskh: that Islam had indeed superseded Judaism and Christianity by abrogation through its new dispensation. The Muslim counter-argument presented in the above sabab consists of adducing a verse of scripture which, it must be admitted, is of questionable applicability; after all, a verse which expressed the free-will of God to do as he pleases with his revelation, e.g., 2/106, the very focus of the naskh dispute, would have proven (and of course did prove) the most effective weapon. Thus, what we have in this sabab is, as Wansbrough suggests, a polemical motif made relevant to Islamic salvation history by two additions: one, a connection point with the traditional story of the life of Muhammad (i.e., the change of qibla) and two, the scriptural prop which serves to link the polemical motif and history. This addition of scripture transforms a neutral statement into a sabab, giving scripture historical location and turning polemic into salvation history. The polemical passage is transformed from its original purpose, and thus the inapplicability of the scriptural verse to the original purpose of the abrogation motif is not totally unexpected.<sup>30</sup>

The fifth and final major sabab relates the verse direction to the qibla and its abrogation; in a sense, it is the logical outcome of the previous sabab. Two different reports are found within the theme, each illustrating a different possibility in the eventual development from polemic to asbāb. The intention of the first would appear to be to say that the verse gave the Prophet permission to turn wherever he liked in prayer when he emigrated to Medina; thus he chose, in emulation of the Jews some reports suggest, the temple of Jerusalem.<sup>31</sup>

This report is vital: it provides a scriptural prop for the qibla to Jerusalem and allows someone such as Makkī to argue that the Qur'ān may only abrogate Qur'ān and not Sunna;<sup>32</sup> one alternative to this was to say that the qibla to Jerusalem was sunna and thus allow Qur'ān to abrogate sunna; another alternative was to postulate abrogation working in the mode of naskh al-ḥukm wa al-tilāwa;<sup>33</sup> a third possibility was Makkī's answer.

The second of these two final reports asserts that this verse was revealed before the imposition of a qibla and allowed prayer oriented in any direction, and then it was abrogated; opinion would seem to vary, postulating either:

- (a) that there never was a Jerusalem qibla<sup>34</sup> or
- (b) that this verse was abrogated by the Jerusalem qibla which was then itself abrogated<sup>35</sup> or
- (c) that this verse abrogates the Jerusalem qibla but comes before the imposition of the Ka'ba as qibla.<sup>36</sup>

Extensive arguments are marshalled by both al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī<sup>37</sup> to reject both major reports in this theme and the possibility

of abrogation playing a part in this verse. Al-Ṭabarī's argument is grounded, it would seem, on two basic ideas:

- (a) the bald statement that this verse was revealed after the Prophet had already begun to pray toward Jerusalem. No evidence is adduced for this.<sup>38</sup>
- (b) that no proof (hujja) (presumably in the form of reliable ḥadīth), that the verse is an abrogator or an abrogated verse arises.<sup>39</sup>

Makḥī, too, sees the problem of this latter point when he considers the position of Mālik who saw the verse as allowing prayer in any direction but then that provision was abrogated. Makḥī classifies this verse as a case of "something abrogated before having been acted upon", (mimmā nusikha qabla 'l-'amal bihi). Therefore, no proof can or does arise.<sup>40</sup>

This by no means exhausts the possibilities of asbāb al-nuzūl for this verse, although what has been covered thus far comprises the most important and common suggestions. Among others, however are the following:

- (a) When "Call upon me, I will answer you" [Q. 40/60] was revealed, they said: "Where?" So...[2/115]...was revealed [nāzalat].<sup>41</sup>
- (b) It was revealed [nāzalat] when the Prophet was turned away from the house [i.e., the Ka'ba] in the year of Ḥudaybiya and the Muslims were distressed thereby.<sup>42</sup>
- (c) That it is connected to the previous verse (and this presumably has the same sabab), the idea being that destruction of mosques does not mean one can no longer face a qibla.<sup>43</sup>

It was noted above that al-Ṭabarī suggests that the verse, in fact, has a general meaning, over and above its specific ones, and it is this interpretation which he favours.<sup>44</sup> Al-Ṭabarī set the terms for his investigation thus: "to God are the East and the West" means that these two are his kingdom and his creation. He then poses the question: but why are only these two points specified? To this he answers with the various asbāb al-nuzūl; he then overrules all these in preference for the interpretation that what is intended is these two points and everything that comes between them of God's creation.

This interpretation is, one may assume, al-Ṭabarī's opinion as to the zāhir of the verse. As if any proof were needed, one has here a clear demonstration of the subjective element of zāhir: for Makkī, the zāhir of this verse indicates the possibility of prayer in any direction in the east or west or elsewhere.<sup>45</sup> One man's zāhir is another's bāṭin, despite the claim of A. Shākir, the editor of al-Ṭabarī, that zāhir is "how the Arabs understand it in their everyday speech".<sup>46</sup>

To reinforce the notion of his understanding of the verse, al-Ṭabarī kindly supplies a synopsis at the end of his treatment of the verse to tell us how the verse fits into the context of the preceding verses:<sup>47</sup>

Someone asks: How does this verse stand in relation to what went before it? [mā hādhihi 'l-āya min allatī qablahā]. To which it is said: It is a continuation [muwāṣila], the meaning being: Who does greater harm than the Christians who prevent worshippers from mentioning God's name in his mosques and are zealous in their destruction. To God are the East and the

West so wherever you turn your faces, mention him, for his face is there. His beneficence, land and country suffice you and he knows what you know and he does not prevent you destroying those who destroyed the mosque of the temple of Jerusalem nor their [your?] preventing those who prevented the mention of God in it--that you mention God wherever you are in God's land, seeking in it his face.

Al-Ṭabarī continues to show his concern with context, treating asbāb al-nuzūl perhaps as special cases of specification of meaning and holding their halakhic meaning, but not removing the general sense of the verse. Note that al-Wāḥidī's claim that asbāb al-nuzūl are the key to all exegesis is hardly a viable presupposition for al-Ṭabarī.<sup>48</sup>

## Notes to 2/115

1. E.g., Wensinck, Muhammad and the Jews of Medina, pp. 96-97; Bell, The Qur'ān Translated I 16, note 2: "A hint of the coming change of Qibla"; Burton, The Collection of the Qur'ān, p. 236. The reason for this view is probably the phrase "To God are the East and the West", used in 2/142 the only proof text of the qibla change according to late Muslim consensus, and in 2/177, post-qibla change according to classical exegetes, but counted as part of the scenario by Burton, The Collection of the Qur'ān, p. 236. See the treatment of these two verses below.
2. Al-Kalbī, p. 13.
3. Muqātil, Khams mi'a āya, ff. 10a-10b.
4. Al-Jassās I 62, four parallel reports; Ibn al-'Arabī I 34, his fourth opinion; al-Qurtubī II 79-80, first opinion, two reports; al-Tabarī II 431-432, reports 1841-1843, the most frequent reports from Ibn Rabī'a rejected as weak; al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, pp. 34-35, first two reports and Wajīz, p. 31; al-Suyūṭī Lubāb, pp. 16-17, fourth, fifth and sixth reports, the sixth report is attributed to al-Kalbī, but is much more elaborate than that found in the printed al-Kalbī text; Berlin 3578, f. 7b, first report.
5. Al-Qurtubī II 80, cf. Ibn al-'Arabī I 35 who gives the dissenting opinions as the Mu'tazila and al-Shāfi'ī. See al-Shāfi'ī, Risāla, translation, p. 72, where only the next sabab is quoted.
6. E.g., al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 16.
7. Muslim, al-Sahīh II 350-353, reports 26-34.
8. Yūturu. "Witr prayer is to be observed as a part of the night (i.e., supererogatory) prayer and should be observed along with the 'Ishā' prayer or with the Tahajjud prayer, before dawn" (Muslim, al-Sahīh, translation, I 341, note 960).
9. Al-Tirmidhi, al-Sahīh, Kitāb Mawāqīt al-Ṣalāt, 143, 144, 186.
10. See QS 174.
11. Al-Qurtubī II 80; Ibn al-'Arabī I 35, his third opinion, "Sound"; al-Jassās I 63, sixth opinion, little legal derivation; al-Tabarī II 530, two reports from Ibn Umar. The sabab also appears in: al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, p. 35, third report attributed specifically to madhhab Ibn Umar; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 16, first report; briefly, Berlin 3578, f. 8a, third report.

12. It is to be noted that not all schools of law agreed on the exact restrictions on the practice. See e.g., al-Qurtubī II 81.
13. Al-Qurtubī II 80-81; see QS 167-168 on ‘illa/qiyās as halakhic deduction.
14. Al-Tabarī II 530; also al-Qurtubī II 80. See e.g., Muslim, al-Sahīh II 489-494, reports 297-305, for "prayer of fear" (i.e., when in fear of being attacked) but note no Quranic prop. Also al-Shāfi'ī, Risāla, translation, p. 72. Note that al-Wāqidī, Asbāb quotes no occasion for 2/239.
15. Especially al-Qurtubī II 79-81.
16. Al-Tabarī II 533-535. Also see Ibn al-‘Arabī I 35.
17. Al-Tabarī II 532-533. Also see al-Qurtubī II 81; Ibn al-‘Arabī I 35; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 17, seventh report taken from al-Tabarī. The report is also found in ḥadīth literature, but not connected to the scriptural verse: see Wensinck, A Handbook of Early Muhammadan Tradition, p. 175, "Nadjāshī". Also see Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 341.
18. Al-Wāqidī, Asbāb, pp. 35-36, fourth report; Berlin 3578, ff. 7b-8a, second report. Cf. al-Tabarī's understanding II 532 that the Najāshī had not known a qibla at all.
19. Cf. al-Tabarī, Annales I 1473 (as cited in A. Guillaume, The Life Of Muhammad, pp. 658-659) for the death of Khusro and Muhammad's knowledge of it at the same time as that king's death; also Ibn Sa‘d, Tabagāt II 24-25, the king dies at the same time that a delegation from Persia arrives.
20. See above pp.127-129 re:Q.2/62.
21. See QS 38-43.
22. See Wensinck, "Nadjāshī" EI<sup>1</sup>; Caetani, Chronographia Islamica I 90 and the reference there to al-Tabarī, Annales I 1720, where it is ascribed to al-Wāqidī, in the printed edition of which it is not found.
23. Al-Qurtubī II 81-82 who quotes extensively from Ibn al-‘Arabī I 35. Note that al-Jassās does not even mention the sabab. Cf. Makkī, p. 113, for the idea that the verse was revealed specifically (makhṣūs) for the prophet in this instance. See too, SEI, "Ṣalāt", part IV at end.
24. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 17; al-Suyūṭī definitely supports the sabab of the supererogatory prayers while travelling or at least misdirected prayer due to darkness, see al-Itqān I 84.



25. Al-Qurtubī II 82.
26. Al-Tabari II 527-528, reports 1833, 1834; abbreviated reports are also found in al-wāḥidī, Asbāḥ, p. 36, sixth report and al-Suyūṭī, Lubāḥ, pp. 16-17, third report.
27. Note also al-Jassās I 62: ankara: deny, disapprove; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 34: i tarāḍa: oppose; Makkī, p. 113, suggests that it was the polytheists who were the actors in this scenario; one can only suggest that this is another typical example of the phenomena treated by Vajda, "Juifs et Musulmans selon le ḥadīth", REJ, CCXXIX (1937), 57-127.
28. See above, esp. pp. 173-174 and SM 16-19.
29. Hibat Allāh, p. 29; al-ʿIraqī, f. 2b (only report); Hibat Allāh adds after this that then the verse was abrogated by 2/143; exactly how this could be he does not make clear--this anecdote makes the verse God's reply to the Jews, i.e., polemic, not a halakhic occasion. It is worth remembering that Hibat Allāh is really only providing a summary, at best, of two centuries of discussion on abrogation; it is not surprising that his argumentation should be weak and shorn of any appropriate subtleties. That does not however reduce the value of the actual narrative reports he adduces.
30. See SM 109-114.
31. Note that al-Jassās I 62, uses ikhtiyār, for the prophet's choice in this matter; this is something Makkī, p. 109, is arguing against, see below. See also Makki, p. 110 and al-Tabarī II 529, report 1838, both authors quoting Ibn Zayd.
32. Makkī, pp. 110-111; he also gives other reports, although not connected to the revelation of 2/115, to support his claim. Note that if abrogation is supported for this verse, it is usually applied only to the phrase "Wherever you turn, there is the face of God"; "To God is the East and the West" always remains muḥkam, see e.g., Hibat Allāh, pp. 12-13. Re: Qur'ān/Sunna abrogation and Makkī, see also Burton, The Collection of the Qur'ān, pp. 55-61 (reference is to pp. 68-69 of the Makkī printed text).
33. See Burton, The Collection of the Qur'ān, pp. 46-49. At this point it is worth calling attention to Burton's treatment of Makkī's six categories of mansūkh (see Burton pp. 84-86, Makkī printed text pp. 58-62). Burton seems to ignore the significance of Makkī's treatment: the theory of three modes of naskh was well established by Makkī's time (d. 437) and indeed proved victorious. But regardless, Makkī attempted to bring out new subtleties in the argumentation. Makkī's treatment is refreshing and serious compared to the popularizing tendency of Hibat Allāh.

34. Al-Ṭabarī II 529 reports 1835-1836 although not in the form of asbāb; al-Qurtubī II 83; al-Jassās I 62; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 34.
35. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 36, fifth report.
36. See Watt, Muhammad at Medina, p. 202 although tenuous.
37. Al-Ṭabarī II 533-535; al-Qurtubī II 83.
38. Al-Ṭabarī II 534.
39. Al-Ṭabarī II 534-535.
40. Makkī, p. 112; cf. Saʿādyā, Kitāb al-ʾAmanāt, text p. 17, trans. p. 169: "He who holds abrogation is possible would not believe it to be so unless the law to be abrogated had been carried out at least once, lest it be thought that it had been ordained in vain."
41. Al-Qurtubī II 83; al-Ṭabarī II 534 report 1848; Makkī, p. 113 (no. 4) but not a sabab; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 17, eighth report; Berlin 3578, f. 8a, fourth report.
42. Al-Qurtubī II 83; thus related to 2/114 and the last opinion there; cf. at next note.
43. Al-Qurtubī II 83.
44. See above pp. 194-195; al-Ṭabarī II 533.
45. Makkī, p. 112.
46. Note 2 to al-Ṭabarī II 15; also see note 2 to al-Ṭabarī I 72.
47. Al-Ṭabarī II 536.
48. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 4-5.

2/116        They say: "God has taken  
               a son; glory be to him!"  
               Rather, to him is what is  
               in the heavens and the earth,  
               each obeying him.

Al-Wāḥidī and Berlin 3578 each provide reports for this verse,  
 although their approach seems to be different; al-Wāḥidī's report reads:

It was revealed concerning the Jews  
 when they said 'Uzayr is the  
 son of God and concerning the Christians  
 of Najrān when they said the Messiah  
 is the son of God and concerning the  
 polytheists among the Arabs who said the  
 angels are the daughters of God.<sup>1</sup>

Berlin 3578 has the same substance in its report but separates  
 the matter into three alternatives, Jews, Christians or polytheists, each  
 opinion attributed to a different authority; he finally adds that al-  
 Tha'labī thought it was revealed about all three (thus al-Tha'labī's  
 opinion being parallel to al-Wāḥidī's report).<sup>2</sup>

The report is a simple identification of the ambiguous (ta'yīn  
al-mubham) within the context of sectarian dispute; the same identification  
 possibilities are mentioned in most glosses on the verse by exegetes,<sup>3</sup>  
 although never in the form of a sabab except in the two instances above.  
 The most common identification given is to the Christians specifically;  
 by combining all three groups al-Wāḥidī may be trying to create a sense  
 of continuity with 2/113 where delegations of both Jews and Christians  
 meet in their disputation (in the pagan Arabian setting). Such attention  
 to context is made explicit by al-Ṭabarī<sup>4</sup> who, while acknowledging all  
 three identifications, limits his interpretation to the Christians  
 only on the basis of the context established in this case in 2/114  
 where Christians are those who forbade entrance into mosques.

## Notes to 2/116

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 36 and Wajīz, p. 31.
2. Berlin 3578, f. 8a.
3. E.g., al-Qurṭubī II 85; al-Ṭabarī II 537; note al-Jassās I 65 uses the verse for halakhic purposes: "... (the verse) is analogous [naẓīr] to 'It is not appropriate that the Merciful take a son; none in the heavens and the earth come to the Merciful except as a slave' [19/92-93] and that requires the emancipation of his son by him if he owns him...so this verse [i.e., 2/116] indicates the emancipation of the son if the father owns him." The sabab plays no role in this deduction.
4. Al-Ṭabarī II 537.

2/118

Those who do not know say:

"Why does God not speak to us or send a sign?"

In the same way, those from before them said  
the like of their words. Their hearts are alike.  
We have made our signs clear to people who  
stand firm.

One sabab is found for this verse which, through the identification  
of the protagonist, links it back to 2/113:

Rāfi' ibn Huraymila said to the prophet:

"Oh Muḥammad! If you are a prophet from  
God as you say, tell God to speak to us  
so that we may hear his voice." So God revealed  
concerning that...[2/118]... 1

Such is the story given by Ibn Ishāq and a number of other  
sources, notably though, not al-Wāḥidī nor Berlin 3578;<sup>2</sup> it is, like so  
many other anecdotes in Ibn Ishāq which have been studied by Wansbrough,  
a polemical motif--the prophetic challenge on a primitive level--and is  
one of numerous other similar instances which are linked by means of the  
sabab to Quranic verses. It should be noted here that there is a lack  
in the sabab of the complete Quranic motif--challenged here is only  
God's speaking to man (i.e., as God spoke to Moses) but not specifically  
at least the revelation of a sign.

Al-Ṭabarī once again would appear to be bucking popular opinion  
in his interpretation of this verse;<sup>3</sup> in his identification of "those  
who do not know" he adduces three possible parties: the Christians,  
the Jews (for which the above sabab is cited) and the Arab polytheists.  
Al-Ṭabarī opts for an interpretation focussed on the Christians alone.  
The argument in favour of this is once again based on the context:  
li-anna dhālika fī siyāq khabar allā 'anhum (the use of the technical  
term for context--siyāq--is to be remarked). The reference to "those

from before them" in the verse is then interpreted in the obvious way as a reference to the Jews in the time of Moses, although even here al-Ṭabarī is able to cite the fact that there is ikhtilāf on the question. Al-Ṭabarī's procedure indicates once again that asbāb al-nuzūl as historical referents hold no special significance for him, even when they are attributed to Ibn Ishāq, and that consideration of the haggadic context can be of utmost importance.

## Notes to 2/118

1. Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 549; al-Tabarī II 551, report 1862; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 17, the name given once again as Ibn Khuzayma; also see SM 17.
2. Cf. the version of al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, Princeton MS Garrett 135 (Yahuda 5143), f. 6a, giving the marginal addition of the sabab for this verse; also see al-Wāḥidī, Wajīz, p. 31, phrase glossed as "the polytheist Arabs".
3. Al-Tabarī II 550-556 esp. 552; also see Mujāhid, p. 86; cf. Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 20b, where "those who do not know" is glossed as the polytheists. Al-Qurṭubī II 91, also adduces all three possibilities but states no preference.

2/119            Indeed we sent you with the truth  
                  as a bringer of good tidings and as a  
                  warner. You will not be questioned  
                  [Do not ask] about the inhabitants of  
                  hell!

As indicated in the above translation of the verse, two radically different interpretations of this verse can be suggested depending upon the reading of the text. The word in question تَسْأَلُ is read according to the qirā'āt literature either in the first form passive tus'alu or in the first form imperative tas'al.<sup>1</sup> Accompanying these two readings are different asbāb, each apparently designed to explicate the appropriate meaning.

In explanation of the reading tus'alu, al-Qurṭubī proffers the following sabab on the authority of Muqātil: "The Prophet said: 'If God would reveal his strength to the Jews, they would believe'. So God revealed: 'You will not be questioned about the inhabitants of hell!'", i.e., they are not your responsibility.<sup>2</sup> Second, to support tas'al, al-Qurṭubī traces the following statements through Muḥammad ibn Ka'b from Ibn 'Abbās: "The Prophet said one day: 'If only I knew what happened to my parents!'" So this verse was revealed (fa nazalat) 'Do not ask about the inhabitants of hell!'"<sup>3</sup> Al-Wāhidī and Berlin 3578 also give both of these asbāb in the opposite order however, that is, first the sabab re: Muḥammad's parents and second that re: the Jews.<sup>4</sup>

One may conjecture at this point the following development of variant readings: first tas'al with its sabab about Muḥammad's parents; this sabab was rejected and both the reading and "occasion of revelation" replaced as a result of two interdependent processes.



The first of these processes occurs out of considerations to fit the verse in with a recurring Quranic motif. Q. 2/130-134 and 2/135-141 are both Jewish-Christian confrontation-polemic passages<sup>5</sup> and both end in the phrase: lā tus'alūna 'ammā kanū ya'malūna, "You will not be asked about what they used to do". The second process was in response to the pressures of the 'isma doctrine.<sup>6</sup> The reasoning may have been: surely Muḥammad would not have contemplated asking God an inappropriate question; further, Muḥammad must have known that the only possible fate for his pagan parents was hell. The conjecture in fact receives support from al-Ṭabarī's extensive comments on this verse.<sup>7</sup> Al-Ṭabarī adduces only the sabab of Muḥammad's parents but this he is constrained to reject on at least two grounds, one, the context of the verse, the other, the implausible nature of the report.

The meaning of speech indicates what its apparent sense (ẓāhir) indicates for it as its meaning unless a clear indication results in proof such that what is intended is other than what the apparent sense indicates. Then it will be incontestable due to the established proof thereof. However, no report exists with proof such that the Prophet was prevented from asking-in this verse-about the inhabitants of hell nor is there any indication of that according to the apparent sense of the revelation [fī ẓāhir al-tanzīl]. It is necessary that the explanation of that report be according to what was mentioned prior to that verse and what is mentioned after it about the Jews, Christians and other people from among the disbelievers, without the prohibition of questioning concerning them.

Thus, as in 2/114 (see above), al-Ṭabarī considers the context<sup>8</sup> as a factor which can override a sabab, especially when there is no overwhelming factor in favour of that sabab's acceptance. As suggested earlier, al-Ṭabarī is concerned to some extent with the haggadic element

of the Qur'ān and, as a result of this, he will allow his opinion about the context to overrule other people's opinion regarding the same. Context, is, after all, a subjective notion.

On this specific verse, however, al-Ṭabarī does not leave the matter with the context alone:

Some consider the report transmitted on the authority of Muḥammad ibn Ka'b sound; however the impossibility of doubt on the part of the prophet--about the people of polytheism being among the people of hell and that his parents were among them--is what disproves the soundness of what Muḥammad ibn Ka'b said, even if the report from him was true to begin with.

Al-Ṭabarī marshalls even further evidence in his case to disprove the reading tas'al and the sabab of Muḥammad's parents: the use of wāw as a conjunction and the witness of shawādh variants (Ubayy mā tus'alu; Ibn Mas'ūd lān tus'ala)<sup>9</sup> which also give the sense of "You will not be asked" and indicate that the context rules in this case.

Significant in all these discussion is that al-Ṭabarī either does not know or does not care to adduce the other sabab of Muḥammad and the Jews, as known by al-Wāḥidī and al-Qurṭubī. That this is a late sabab discovered, transferred or invented to support the variant and the authoritative "plain" (ẓāhir) meaning is the most probable conclusion. Al-Qurṭubī to be sure is aware of the problems inherent in the sabab of Muḥammad's parents and clearly prefers the alternative occasion. Exegetical methods are used to remove the primary difficulties in the former sabab, for one, saying that "Don't Ask!" implies "Don't ask about him!" in the sense of "it reaches above what you can calculate!"<sup>10</sup> A seeming final possibility, adduced by al-Qurṭubī anonymously, is to

suggest that Muhammad actually asked which of his parents died first, that is, their fate was not being questioned, only the circumstances of their deaths. The source of this sabab has not been discovered but its exegetical convenience is too contrived to inspire confidence.<sup>11</sup>

## Notes to 2/119

1. See e.g., al-Dānī, al-Taysīr, p. 76, tas'al is the reading of Nāfi', tus'alu, of all the others.
2. Al-Qurtubī II 92; also see al-Wāhidī, Wajīz, p. 32, the only sabab there adduced.
3. Al-Qurtubī II 92-93; also al-Tabarī II 558-559, reports 1875-1877; in 1876, Muḥammad repeats the formula "If only I knew what happened to my parents", layta shi'rī mā fa'ala abaway, three times.
4. Al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, pp. 36-37; Berlin 3578, f. 8a; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, pp. 17-18 gives only the one version about Muḥammad's parents, in two versions, equalling al-Tabarī's reports 1876 and 1877; both reports al-Suyūṭī considers mursal, incomplete in isnād.
5. See Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 550 for the context provided for 2/134-141.
6. For further examples of exegetical response to the ʿisma doctrine, see Birkeland, The Lord Guideth, pp. 28-33 re:Q. 93/7.
7. Al-Tabarī II 559-562.
8. In this case presumably extending from 2/113; see above p. 178.
9. See e.g., Ibn Khalawayh, Mukhtaṣar, p. 9.
10. Al-Qurtubī II 93.
11. Al-Qurtubī II 93.

2/120

Neither the Jews nor the Christians  
will ever be satisfied with you unless  
you follow their religion.  
Say: The guidance of God, that is  
the guidance. If you follow their  
desires after knowledge has come to you,  
God will give you no protection  
nor help.

One simple report for this verse states that the Jews called Muḥammad to their religion, claiming that they were in possession of guidance; this verse was revealed in response.<sup>1</sup> Such a sabab indicates a basic concern to place the Qur'ān within the narrative framework of the life of Muḥammad and little else; the sabab is therefore in keeping with the work of Muqātil, in whose tafsīr the report seems to have its origin.

Other more elaborate reports are found for the verse as well which place the verse within the context of the central controversies between Muḥammad and the Jews--the change of qibla and the concern over the treaties--although neither attempt to do justice to the Quranic reference to "guidance" in the way that Muqātil does; their interest is primarily haggadic rather than exegetical.

Al-Wāḥidī's first report centres on the matter of the treaties:

The Jews used to ask the prophet for a  
truce and they enticed him with (the  
idea) that if he concluded a truce with  
them and gave them time, they would follow  
and accept him. So God revealed...  
[2/120]... 2

Jewish "treachery" is the continuing polemical motif.

Al-Wāḥidī's second report states:

This was about the qibla. The Jews of Medina  
and the Christians of Najrān used to hope that  
the prophet would pray to their qibla. When  
God changed the qibla to the Ka'ba, that troubled  
them and they gave up all hope that he would  
follow them in their religion. So God  
revealed...[2/120]... 3

The specification in this sabab of Medinan Jews and Christians from Najrān suggests a notion of the influence of the context, starting from 2/113. The dispute and debate among the three parties continues, centering on the sectarian emblems of each religion, the book, the place of worship, the son of God, the sign and the direction of prayer.

## Notes to 2/120

1. Berlin 3578, f. 8a, second report; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 21a; also see al-Ṭabarī II 564.
2. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 37 and Wajīz, p. 32; Berlin 3578, f. 8a, third report; al-Qurṭubī II 94, only report.
3. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 37; Berlin 3578, f. 8a, first report; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 18, only report, quoted from al-Wāḥidī; also see al-Kalbī, p. 13, where the constant gloss in the verse is the qibla.

2/121        Those to whom we gave the book  
               recite it by the truth of its recitations;  
               those are the ones who believe in it.  
               But he who disbelieves in it,  
               those, they are the losers.

Three different identities are given for the Quranic "Those to whom we gave", with the identity of "the Book" varying according to the group.

One report suggests the verse was revealed about the companions of Muḥammad and the book is therefore the Qur'ān.<sup>1</sup> Another report suggests that it was revealed about the forty (!) men who returned from Ethiopia with Ja'far ibn abī Ṭālib; the book once again is the Qur'ān.<sup>2</sup>

The third report identifies the group as the believers from among the Jews especially 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām, and thus the book is the Torah,<sup>3</sup> although in one instance at least the group is expanded to include the Christian monk Bahīrā and the Najāshī.<sup>4</sup>

All the reports serve the same purpose of identifying the unknown; how the exegetes arrive at the point of being able to favour one version over the other is worthy of attention. Al-Qurṭubī gives the two reports about the companions and the Jews and concludes therefore that the verse is general in meaning;<sup>5</sup> the sabab does not act to supply a precise meaning of the verse but rather acts merely in a general exegetical way. Al-Ṭabarī, on the other hand, cites the same two reports but argues for the identification of the Jewish interest and, implicitly, for the Christian one as well.<sup>6</sup> This he argues explicitly on the basis of the context; the companions are not mentioned before this verse nor are they mentioned afterwards. The Jews and the Christians are mentioned however; therefore, it seems more appropriate that the Jews and Christians are intended here (note that al-Ṭabarī poses his question with the phrase الذين عناهم الله بقوله).<sup>7</sup>



Al-Ṭabarī chooses the appropriate sabab on the basis of his notion of the context; that the actual exegetical process worked in reverse would seem equally as plausible. The editor of al-Ṭabarī's work, A. Shākir, finds it necessary to respond to al-Ṭabarī's argument with the statement "May God have mercy on Abu Ja'far", the argument not being found sound by the editor.<sup>8</sup> That "context", like "literal meaning", is a subjective notion, supported only by the consensus of tradition (to which Shākir appeals) is thereby well demonstrated.

## Notes to 2/121

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 37, third report; Berlin 3578, f. 8a, first report; al-Ṭabarī II 564, report 1878; al-Qurṭubī II 95.
2. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 37, first report; Berlin 3578, f. 8a, second report; cf. Ibn Ishāq, Sīra II 359-370.
3. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 37, second report and Wajīz, pp. 32-33; Berlin 3578, f. 8a, third report; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 21a where the name is specified; al-Ṭabarī II 565, report 1879; al-Qurṭubī II 95.
4. Al-Kalbī, p. 14.
5. Al-Qurṭubī II 95.
6. Al-Ṭabarī II 565.
7. al-Ṭabarī II 564-565.
8. Al-Ṭabarī II 565, note 1.

2/125

And when we made the house a refuge  
for man and a place of security.  
Take [they took] the maqām Ibrāhīm  
as a place of prayer. We agreed with  
Abraham and Ishmael that they should purify  
my house to circumambulate, to withdraw  
and to perform the rakʿa (there).

Only al-Suyūṭī among the asbāb authors reproduces reports concerning this verse; the central sabab is from al-Bukhārī to the effect that this verse is one of the muwāfaqāt ʿUmar. ʿUmar urged Muḥammad to "take the maqām Ibrāhīm as a place of prayer"; God then agreed (wāfaqa) with ʿUmar and revealed the verse. The report from al-Bukhārī also credits ʿUmar with being the instigating force behind the āyat al-hijāb (Q. 33/35) as well as Q. 66/5; in the latter instance ʿUmar's wording once again co-incides with the Qurʾān, whereas in the former, the important factor seems to be raising the point of discussion rather than the wording itself.<sup>1</sup>

It is within the context of the work of al-Ṭabarī that this sabab gains exegetical significance. The consonantal form واخذوا in the Qurʾān is read two ways, as indicated in the translation: wa-ttakhidhū take!<sup>2</sup> or wa-ttakhadhū, they took.<sup>3</sup> The latter reading is taken in parallel with the initial jaʿalnā and thus understood as meaning "we made the house and they took a place of prayer", as all referring to the time of Abraham; the use of maqām Ibrāhīm was established at that time and continued from then on. In this light, the verse is seen to fit into the full qisṣa of Abraham and the establishment of "Islam" in the patriarchal era.<sup>4</sup>

The first reading, however, implies that Muḥammad is being commanded to take the maqām Ibrāhīm as a place of prayer; adduced to support this contention is the sabab of ʿUmar saying "If only we could take the maqām Ibrāhīm as a place of prayer!"<sup>5</sup> Thus the sabab serves an exegetical

function in connection with debates over variant readings.<sup>6</sup>

Al-Suyūṭī also has a comment to add to his cited reports: "The apparent meaning [ẓāhir]...is that this verse was revealed at the farewell pilgrimage."<sup>7</sup> While that may appear to be a chronological statement based on asbāb information, the exact process going on should be noted: the sabab here, after all, has no chronological information actually contained within it. Rather, a chronology of Muḥammad's life is being assumed initially and the sabab is being interpreted so as to make it fit into that chronological stencil. Since instructions about the full rites of the ḥajj were not given until the farewell pilgrimage, the assumption suggests, this verse must stem from that time since prior to that time the pilgrimage rites had not been elaborated.<sup>8</sup>

## Notes to 2/125

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 18, first report equals al-Bukhārī, al-Sahīh, Kitāb al-Tafsīr, pp. 11-12; second report from Ibn Mardawayh relates only to 2/125; note that al-Bukhārī's report does not include 2/97-98 among 'Umar's credits; also see Sufyān al-Thawrī, p. 9; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 85; and see below note 4 and 5.
2. The reading of the majority, see al-Dānī, al-Taysīr, p. 76.
3. The reading of ahl al-madīna and al-shams, see al-Dānī, al-Taysīr, p. 76.
4. Al-Tabarī III 32-33.
5. Al-Tabarī III 30-31 reports 1985-1987; al-Qurṭubī II 112 has all the muwāfaqāt reports and the discussion of the variant but he does not connect the two.
6. See the exemplary article by M. J. Kister, "Maqām Ibrāhīm: A stone with an inscription", Le Muséon 85 (1971) 477-491; Kister points out that even with the reading wa'ttakhidhū the meaning is sometimes taken as referring to the past; this strikes me as an exegetical attempt to remove the differences between the variant readings.
7. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 18.
8. Note, then too, that this would involve a definition of maqām Ibrāhīm as the rock itself most likely; the notion that the maqām is actually the whole pilgrimage (see Kister, Le Muséon 84 [1971] 479 and notes there) may have been devised in order to avoid the "chronological" problem that al-Suyūṭī suggests, sūra 2 generally considered as one of the first Medinan sūras, the farewell pilgrimage not taking place until the year 10; see Ibn Ishāq, Sīra II 601.

2/130           Who could turn away from the religion  
                   of Abraham without his soul  
                   being foolish? Indeed, we choose him  
                   in the world, and in the hereafter he will  
                   be among the righteous.

Al-Suyūṭī and Berlin 3578 quote a sabab for this verse, derived from Muqātil's Tafsīr (according to Berlin 3578). The sabab is found in no other source consulted:

'Abd Allāh ibn Salām called his brother's  
 two sons, Salama and Muhājir, to Islam.  
 He said to them: "You know that God said  
 in the Torah 'I am sending from among the  
 children of Ishmael a prophet named Aḥmad.  
 He who believes in him will  
 be rightly guided and a true believer;  
 he who does not believe in him will  
 be cursed.'" So Salama converted but  
 Muhājir turned away. So God revealed...[2/130]...<sub>1</sub>

The sabab is tangential at best; Muhājir is obviously supposed to represent the foolish one, Salama the one who sticks with "the religion of Abraham". More important to the sabab it would seem is the continual motif of Jewish rejection of the alleged prognosis of Muḥammad/Aḥmad in the Torah--that being the Quranic "turning away" made equivalent here to tahṛīf/kitmān.

## Notes to 2/130

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 18; Berlin 3578, ff. 8a-8b; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 22a; the names Salama and Muhājir could hardly be more fortuitous and remind one of an aetiological narrative.

2/133

Were you witnesses when death appeared to Jacob?  
 When he said to his sons: "What will you worship  
 after me?" They said: "We will worship your  
 God, and the God of your fathers, Abraham,  
 Ishmael and Isaac, the one true God. We will  
 submit ourselves to him."

This account of the scene of Jacob's death-bed talk with his  
 sons, probably a reference to Genesis 49/1 and elaborations thereon<sup>1</sup>,  
 is given a sabab in al-Wāḥidī and Berlin 3578, once again derived from  
 Muqātil.

The Jews said to the prophet:  
 "Is it not that Jacob entrusted his  
 sons with Judaism [al-Yahūdīya] at his  
 death?"<sup>2</sup>

The statement that Jacob "entrusted" something to his son is actually a  
 reference to the previous verse 2/132, where Jacob entrusts "Islam" to  
 his sons. This sabab therefore pictures the Jews as contradicting that  
 statement to which this verse is then the rebuttal. This use of the  
sabab indicates once again a concern for haggadic progression, making  
 clear the connection between verses and the overall intent of the story.  
 Furthermore, the unspecified "you" of "were you witnesses" is made plain  
 by such a procedure.



## Notes to 2/133

1. See A. Katsh, Judaism and the Koran, p. 107.
2. Berlin 3578, f. 8b; al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 37 and Wajīz, p. 36; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 22a.

2/135        They say: "Be Jews or Christians  
               (so that) you will be guided!"  
               Say: Rather, the religion of Abraham  
               the ḥanīf; he was not of the polytheists.

The asbāb material for this verse, which is not plentiful, centers on the identification of "they say"; in this way, the verse is little different from 2/111 and 2/113 where Jews, Christians and Muslims debate the relative merits of their religion. Notable here is that the asbāb material makes no attempt to link the notion of the ḥanīf with Abraham as opposed to the Jews and the Christians; neither theology nor true polemic is the aim of these asbāb, but rather simply haggadic completeness.

Al-Suyūṭī quotes a simple report derived from Ibn Ishāq in which Ibn Ṣūriyā tries to tempt Muḥammad to Judaism by claiming that "there is no guidance except through what we have." Reference to the Christians is limited simply to that "they said likewise."<sup>1</sup>

Al-Wāḥidī's report is more extensive but only slightly more informative; Berlin 3578 edits al-Wāḥidī's report, totally eliminating the Christian reference.

The verse was revealed about the Jewish leaders in Medina, Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf, Mālik ibn Ṣayf, Wahb ibn Yahūdā and Abū Yāsar ibn Akḥṭab and about the Christians of the people of Najrān. They argued with the Muslims about religion, each party claiming that they were truer to the religion of God than the others. The Jews said: "Our prophet Moses was the greatest of the prophets, our book is the greatest of the books and our religion is the greatest of the religions." They disbelieved in Jesus, the Gospels, Muḥammad and the Qur'ān. The Christians said: "Our prophet Jesus is the greatest of the prophets, our book is the greatest of the books and our religion is the greatest of the religions." They disbelieved in Muḥammad and the Qur'ān. Each of the two parties said to the believers: "Adopt our religion; there is no religion except that!" And they called them to their religion.<sup>2</sup>

The report fulfills the basic haggadic function and only indicates in a very rudimentary way the area of conflict between the religions.

## Notes to 2/135

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 19; equals Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 549-550; al-Ṭabarī III 101-102, report 2090.
2. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 38 and much abbreviated in Wajīz, p. 36; Berlin 3578, f. 8b. Also see Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 22b, whose report is limited to a similar list of names and the final paragraph.

2/138 (Rather, it is) the baptism of God  
and who is better than God at baptism?  
We are his worshippers.

Al-Wāḥidī cites the following report as a sabab for this verse:

When a child is born to one of the Christians  
and he is seven days old, they baptize  
him in water--this is called al-ma' mūdīya  
(Christening)--in order to purify him thereby.  
They said (that) this is the cleansing in the  
place of circumcision. When they do that  
they say: "Now he is truly a Christian!"  
So God revealed this verse.<sup>1</sup>

Berlin 3578<sup>2</sup> repeats an abbreviated version of this report and  
al-Qurṭubī<sup>3</sup> repeats the entire report, but adds, rather than "so God  
revealed this verse", "God rejected that (action) of theirs". Al-Qurṭubī  
thus manages to make a bit more explicit the exact nature of the connection  
between the verse and the sabab but still it is quite evident that the  
report is totally exegetical. No attempt is made even to put the explanation  
within the context of debates between Christians and Muslims; this  
reflects, once again, a wide conception of the notion of sabab.

Al-Ṭabarī<sup>4</sup> produces two exegetical reports which put the notion  
of baptism within the context of Judaism and Christianity, perhaps  
because of the wide context in which the verse is found although that  
point is not made explicit. Once again, too, al-Ṭabarī's exegetical  
glosses serve precisely the same exegetical function as does al-Wāḥidī's  
sabab.

## Notes to 2/138

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 38.
2. Berlin 3578, f. 8b.
3. Al-Qurṭubī II 144.
4. Al-Ṭabarī III 117-118, reports 2113, 2114 (the latter, Jews only). On baptism in Judaism, see G. F. Moore, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era I 332-335; G. Vermes, Scripture and Tradition, Chapter 7.

2/142-143a The fools among the people will say: "What has turned them from their qibla which was imposed upon them?" Say: To God is the east and the west, guiding whom he will to the straight path. Thereby we have made you an umma wasat so that you may witness to the people and (so that) the prophet may witness to you. We made the qibla which was imposed upon you in order to distinguish who would follow the prophet from those who would turn on their heels. Indeed it was grave except for those whom God guided.

Various reports are brought forth for this verse but all agree that this pericope came in response to complaints from non-believers after the Muslim qibla was changed to the Ka'ba. The narratives thus often include much of the information included in the discussion of 2/144 below. Where the reports show some variation is in the identification of exactly who are the "fools" mentioned in the beginning of this verse. Al-Suyūṭī's treatment of the whole section verse 142-144 is minimal and he gives no identification of the protagonists; one suspects that he felt the whole incident too self-evident to require elaboration.<sup>1</sup> Al-Wāḥidī following al-Bukhārī, on the other hand, does bother to gloss al-sufahā' as the Jews in the course of his presentation of one report from al-Bukhārī which gives the general synopsis of the whole scenario.<sup>2</sup> Only Berlin 3578 produces detail and some variation. His first report gives the Jews as the protagonists and identifies them as being people "like Rifā'a and Ka'b"; this should be compared with Ibn Ishāq's list of seven similar people. Berlin 3578 adds, following Ibn Ishāq, that the Jews offered to follow Muḥammad if only he would return to their qibla, thus following one of the constant polemical motifs.<sup>3</sup>

The second report of Berlin 3578 isolates the polytheists of Mecca who stated to Muḥammad: "Do you detest the qibla of your fathers?

Then return to it so that you may return to their religion!" Unfortunately, a full exegesis of this report and how it would fit into the overall interpretation has not been found and thus the sabab remains somewhat opaque.<sup>4</sup>

The final report of Berlin 3578 specifies the hypocrites who made the statement quoted in the Qur'ān in order "to mock" Muḥammad. Once again, the flexibility in the categories of opponents is displayed.<sup>5</sup>

Berlin 3578 adds another report specifically to the phrase "thereby we have made you umma wasat" making that, too, a retort to another statement of the Jews, unconnected, it would seem, with the matter of the qibla: "The Jews said: 'Our qibla is the qibla of the prophets and we are the just (ʿudūl) people.' So the verse was revealed." The gloss contained within this sabab of wasat = ʿudūl is the most common understanding of that word and indicates the exegetical content of the sabab quite clearly.<sup>6</sup>

Overall, there are several important points to be noted about these reports; with the exception of Berlin 3578, it seems apparent that to most exegetes the meaning and context of these verses was clear and did not occasion a large amount of debate. Furthermore, and more importantly, no account would seem to be taken of the Quranic phrase sa-yaqūlu "they will say"; no attempt is made to incorporate that future reference into the sabab.

The use of the sabab, with its implied temporal connection between the verse and the statement of the protagonists, would seem to ignore or even destroy the notion of the future occurrence here predicted in the Qur'ān and thus one of the miracles<sup>7</sup> of the Qur'ān. Either the reports of this kind found in Ibn Ishāq (that the Jews came, asked Muḥammad about



the change of his qibla, and then the verse was revealed) are not to be taken as implying a temporal sequence (and thus are purely exegetical in intent) or the matter of the future prediction was of no great concern to some exegetes.

It would appear, however, that both al-Jaṣṣāṣ and al-Qurṭubī were conscious of this problem; both avoid using the phrase nazalat fī in connection with the reports, leaving the remains as exegetical comments only. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ asserts quite plainly that the verse "was revealed before the abrogation (of the qibla)"<sup>8</sup> and al-Qurṭubī states that "God knew that they would say... 'what has turned them'".<sup>9</sup>

One further point is raised by both al-Jaṣṣāṣ and al-Qurṭubī: that this verse implies within it the concept of intra-Quranic naskh and is effective in arguments against those who feel otherwise; that the verse was the focal point in such disputes among Muslims can hardly be doubted.<sup>10</sup> Al-Jaṣṣāṣ adds one additional comment as well,<sup>11</sup> that "the fools" of the verse refers to Jews who said "What has turned them..." in order "to disclaim naskh because a group of them did not accept naskh". This suggestion, unparalleled in other sources consulted, indicates that the verse may well have found its place in inter-religious polemic as well.<sup>12</sup>

## Notes to 2/142-143a

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 19 reworked from Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 550 and al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ I 104-105.
2. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 38-39; al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ I 104-105; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 40; also see al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 84-85 and al-Qurṭubī II 148 but cf. below.
3. Berlin 3578, f. 8b; Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 550; also see al-Ṭabarī III 132-133, report 2149 and III 139, report 2162; most of al-Ṭabarī's reports are concerned to establish the fact of the change of the qibla, see below ad 2/144. Also see Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 23a although his interest seems to be more in establishing the practice of ṣalāt in Mecca.
4. Berlin 3578, f. 8b; also see al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 85, al-Qurṭubī II 148 but cf. below; al-Qurṭubī's report perhaps makes a bit more sense: "When the disbelievers of Quraysh rejected the change of the qibla, they said: 'Muḥammad longs for his birthplace! Soon he will return to your religion!'" See also al-Kalbī, p. 15 where the Jews and polytheists are glossed.
5. Berlin 3578, f. 8b; also al-Ṭabarī III 140, report 2162; al-Qurṭubī II 148 but cf. below.
6. Berlin 3578, f. 8b; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 23b; see e.g., al-Ṭabarī III 141-145 and Sufyān al-Thawrī, p. 10 for interpretations of wasat; that support for the notion of the ijmāʿ of the community is to be derived from this Quranic phrase (see e.g., al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 88-90) seems to be far from a concern in this sabab.
7. See e.g., al-Baydawi, Anwār al-tanzīl, p. 34 where it is explicitly called a muʿjiza.
8. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 85-86.
9. Al-Qurṭubī II 147-148 although cf. II 158 where he quotes from al-Ṭabarī the notion that verse 142 followed in revelation verse 144.
10. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 85; al-Qurṭubī II 151.
11. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 86.
12. Note re: this verse that in his discussion al-Ṭabarī several times uses the term sabab in a non-technical sense: II 132, 137, 139.

2/143b      God would not make your faith worthless.  
 Indeed God is kind and merciful to the people.

There is general agreement within the asbāb books and among exegetes overall that this part of the verse refers to a post-qibla situation and is, contrary to 2/143a, a retort to questioning Muslims. Only two basic reports are found for the verse, both of which cite the case of people who had died prior to the qibla-change; what will be their fate, it is asked. This verse was then revealed in response.<sup>1</sup>

Muqātil adds an interesting prologue to this basic report, putting the verse squarely within the polemic framework once again.

Huyayy ibn Akhtab, the Jew, and his companions, said to the Muslims: "Tell us of your prayer to Jerusalem! Was it (evidence of) guidance or error? By God, if it was (evidence of) guidance, you have turned away from it, and if it was (evidence of) error, you profess that God (is connected) to (error). You must follow one of these two in (this matter). Those from among you who died on (the old qibla) did they die in (a state of) error?" The Muslims replied: "What God orders is guidance and what he forbids is error". They said: "But what proof do you have for him who died while following our qibla?" [Here follows a list of such people who died]... So the Muslims said to the prophet: "Our brothers died while praying to the first qibla and now God has turned us to the qibla of Abraham. What is the status of our brothers?" So God revealed...[2/143b]...<sup>2</sup>

The argumentation here is plainly over the principle of abrogation, and the either/or proposition posed by the Jewish opponents of abrogation fits the pattern of other such disputations both in the asbāb material and elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> Muqātil's presentation of this account manages to maintain the polemical haggadic structure of the Quranic pericope although at a certain distance from the actual Qur'ān text; the polemical story seems primary in the pericope while the actual revelation remains internal to

the community and not polemical in and by itself as compared, for instance, with verses 142-143a.

The appearance of this virtual unanimity reflected in the asbāb material glosses over what was perceived to have been a central problem in exegesis and Muslim theology as revealed in this verse: what exactly is "faith"?<sup>4</sup> Al-Ṭabarī provides a range of answers: prayer, martyrdom or works;<sup>5</sup> Ibn Ishāq glosses the phrase "that is, your faith in the first qibla, and your faith in your prophet and your following him to the other qibla and your obeying your prophet about it (that is, so he will certainly give you your reward for both of them together)",<sup>6</sup> a statement which al-Kalbī in a sense sums up by glossing the Quranic phrase as "he would not abrogate your faith [i.e., as he has abrogated the qibla"]".<sup>7</sup> The major focus of the dispute as reflected in these interpretations is whether "faith" is something external, which can therefore be judged by man (that is, prayer) or something internal, known only to God (and thus perhaps subject to abrogation!). This dispute is usually put by the exegetes in terms of the Murji'a versus the rest of the community and is, of course, a dispute of only antiquarian interest for most of the exegetes who already equated faith with prayer. That Ibn Ishāq should reflect a different point of view is interesting although quite apparently of little consequence. Regardless, the asbāb material adds little to the debate, certainly allowing or even encouraging the equation of faith and prayer although not making the point elaborately in any way. The narratives seem more designed to point to a change of audience for the Quranic address than to be of theological value.

## Notes to 2/143b

1. Al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, p. 39 and Wajīz, p. 38; Berlin 3578, ff. 8b-9a; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 19; Sufyān al-Thawrī, p. 12; al-Ṭabarī III 167-170, reports 2219-2225; al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Tafsīr, p. 14 (equals al-Ṭabarī reports 2220-2222); Ibn al-ʿArabī I 41; al-Qurṭubī II 157.
2. Muqātil, Tafsīr, ff. 23b-24a.
3. See e.g., pp. 178-179, ad 2/115.
4. See Ibn al-ʿArabī I 41-42; al-Qurṭubī II 157-158.
5. Al-Ṭabarī III 167-169.
6. Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 550.
7. Al-Kalbī, p. 16, one of several alternatives suggested.

2/144

We saw you turning your face in the heavens.  
 So we turn you to the qibla that will please you.  
 Turn your face in the direction of the holy mosque.  
 Wherever you are, turn your face in its direction.  
 Those who were given the books know that the  
 truth is from their Lord. God is not  
 ignorant of what they do.

Once again, all the asbāb reports are unanimous in their basic plot about this verse: Muḥammad wanted to return to the Ka'ba as qibla, God perceived this and revealed this verse allowing him to do so. A typical report is the following one found in al-Wāḥidī (although this report has more narrative content than most):

The Prophet said to Gabriel: "I wish that God would change me from the qibla of the Jews to something else"--he used to wish for the Ka'ba because it was the qibla of Abraham. Gabriel said to him: "I am only a servant like you, I have power over nothing; ask your lord to turn you from it to the qibla of Abraham." Then Gabriel disappeared and the prophet turned his sights to the heavens hoping that Gabriel would bring him that which he wanted. So God revealed this verse.<sup>1</sup>

The narrative attempts to do justice to the notion of Muḥammad's looking in the sky--not vainly but looking for Gabriel; the narrative also displays a concern with the sectarian emblem of the direction of prayer: Muḥammad wants his own direction to establish the identity of his religious movement. This notion gets expressed in two different ways, often through asbāb material, in the statement that Muḥammad did not like facing Jerusalem because it was connected with Judaism<sup>2</sup> and in the statement that Muḥammad wanted the Ka'ba as the focus because it was the qibla of Abraham.<sup>3</sup>

A large number of reports for this verse seem to display an inordinate amount of attention to the dating of this event of the change of qibla, most of them stating that it occurred 13, 16 or 17 or 18 months after Muḥammad's hijra.<sup>4</sup> It would seem likely that this dating is

significant only for its relationship to the battle of Badr and for the fact that Muslims were killed in that battle. Their deaths raised the problem answered in 2/143b, that is, the problem of Muslims killed who had not prayed to the new qibla. The battle of Badr, note, is fixed as having happened eighteen months after the hijra in the month of Ramaḍān. Its date is fixed both textually, as Jones has pointed out,<sup>5</sup> and also exegetically through interpretation of Q. 8/41 and 2/185--the revelation of the Qur'ān, the day of furqān and the Battle of Badr all co-incide with Ramaḍān. It may well have been out of concern for the interpretation of 2/143b (although admittedly that point is never made explicit in the treatment of that verse<sup>6</sup>) that people such as Ibn Ishāq placed the change of the qibla right before the account of the battle.<sup>7</sup> Earlier dating of the change may reflect different interpretations of that verse. Regardless, none of the asbāb material provides sufficient information to allow an argument to be fully based upon them alone. As always, polemical motifs (as displayed in conflict over sectarian emblems) seem more important.

The abrogation discussions do not seem to have turned around precision in the number of months involved, let alone the actual time of day at which the change of qibla took place, an issue which Hibat Allāh discusses somewhat aimlessly.<sup>8</sup> As most texts state explicitly, the Qur'ān itself readily indicates that there was a change of the direction of prayer (in vs. 142); and if one interprets verse 115 as being relevant to the direction of prayer, it must therefore have been abrogated;<sup>9</sup> no further argumentation, based on historical data, is needed or indeed presented to define the change of the qibla.

## Notes to 2/144

1. Al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, p. 39; another report pp. 39-40 and Wajīz, p. 38; Berlin 3578, f. 9a; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 19; Sufyān al-Thawrī, pp. 11-12; al-Ṭabarī III 173-174, reports 2230-2233 only the last formally a sabab; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 9; al-Qurṭubī II 158; Hibat Allāh, pp. 12-13; al-Naḥḥās, p. 14.
2. E.g., al-Ṭabarī III 173-174, report 2234-2235; also al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 90; al-Qurṭubī II 158.
3. E.g., al-Ṭabarī III 174, report 2236; also al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 90.
4. See above, the sources in note 1; the reports from al-Bukhārī give 16 or 17 months; Hibat Allāh, p. 13 gives the full range of possibilities.
5. See J. M. B. Jones "The chronology of the Maghāzī--A Textual Survey" BSOAS XIX (1957) 247 and 260; also see K. Wagtendonk, Fasting in the Koran, pp. 82-122 although his approach is quite different from the one pursued here.
6. Some reports do express concern for those killed, gutila; on the other hand, others simply say those who have died, māta.
8. Hibat Allāh, p. 13; also see al-Naḥḥās, pp. 13-15.
9. See note 8 and al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 85 and al-Qurṭubī II 151 ad 2/142.



2/145

And even if you brought to those who have been given the book every sign, they would not follow your qibla and you are not going to follow their qibla, nor indeed will they follow each other's qibla. And even if you followed their desires after what has come to you of knowledge, you would then be of the wrongful.

Only Berlin 3578 among the asbāb books quotes a sabab for this verse, once again one from Muqātil:

The Jews and the Christians of Najrān said to the prophet: "Bring us a sign just as the prophets before you brought us, then we will believe in you." So the verse was revealed.<sup>1</sup>

Once again a stereotyped saying of polemic content, debating the relative merits of the prophets, is cited; the sabab shows basic haggadic and historicization tendencies, common to Muqātil.

Al-Ṭabarī<sup>2</sup> and al-Qurṭubī<sup>3</sup>, however, repeat a sabab which they had previously cited for verse 143 where the focus of the dispute is put within the qibla context, the Jews stating that they would believe in Muḥammad if he would return to their qibla; the citation of this sabab by these two exegetes displays a greater concern for context and canonical verse-ordering than the sabab in Berlin 3578. The polemical basis of all the reports however is evident.

## Notes to 2/145

1. Berlin 3578, f. 9a: Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 24a where the protagonists are also named.
2. Al-Ṭabarī III 185-186, report 2257 (equals report 2204).
3. Al-Qurṭubī II 162.

2/146      Those to whom we have given the book  
 know it just as they know their  
 sons. But a group of them has concealed the  
 truth which they know.

Only al-Wāḥidī and Berlin 3578 cite a report for this verse;  
 the sabab divides into two parts, the first half consisting of glosses  
 on the verse itself, glosses virtually identical with those found in al-  
 Kalbī's Tafsīr.

(The verse) was revealed about the believers  
 among the people of the book, 'Abd Allāh ibn  
 Salām and his companions. They knew the prophet  
 by his character, description and mission  
 (as described) in their book, just as one of  
 them would know his son when he saw him with a  
 group of youths.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly within the understanding put forth in this sabab, the  
 "It" of the Quranic verse is to be equated with the prognostication of  
 Muḥammad in the Torah; in addition the phrase "as they know their sons"  
 is made a bit clearer by the sabab. The report then continues with a  
 narrative in the voice of 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām, who explains that he was  
 prepared to witness "that Muḥammad was truly and certainly the prophet  
 of God" but that all the Jews did not witness to the fact because they  
 did not know "what they would tell their women-folk".<sup>2</sup> This elaboration  
 of the concealment and hypocrisy motifs is common to many other verses  
 and serves the basic haggadic function of elaboration.

Alternate identifications of the Quranic "it" of which the  
 hypocrites are supposed to know, are provided in exegetical texts; al-  
 Ṭabarī prefers the gloss of "it" as the qibla, and the qibla is what the  
 hypocrites should recognize as they recognize their sons; in this way,  
 al-Ṭabarī keeps the verse within the contextual pericope.<sup>3</sup> Muqātil, on  
 the other hand, elaborates an entirely different set of circumstances where

Ka' b ibn Akhtab and Ibn Šūriyā, the Jews, say to the prophet that they "will never circumambulate the Ka'ba" and that that act is a "great stumbling block" to them in Muḥammad's religion. To this Muḥammad retorted within the sabab that the circumambulation is written in the Torah and the Gospels but was being concealed by the Jews; the latter naturally replied that they were not concealing anything.<sup>4</sup>

These other situations provided in the tafsīrs indicate most importantly that the information compiled in the asbāb books is extremely limited, scraping only the surface of the variety of possibilities put forth on different occasions. The function of all such information is to provide a narrative exegetical background for interpretation, whether that information formally goes by the name of sabab or not, as in the case of the information cited by al-Ṭabarī simply as exegetical glosses.

## Notes to 2/146

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 40; Berlin 3578, f. 9a; al-Kalbī, p. 16; also see al-Qurṭubī II 162 for a similar report.
2. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 50.
3. Al-Ṭabarī III 188-189.
4. Muqātil, Tafsīr, ff. 24a-24b.

2/150

So, from where you start out, turn your face in the direction of the holy mosque. Wherever you are, turn your faces in its direction, so that there will not be an argument against you among the people, except those among them who are wrong-doers. So do not fear them but fear me, so that I may complete my blessing on you so that you may perhaps be guided.

The sabab for this verse, found only in al-Suyūṭī's text, quoted from al-Ṭabarī, is plainly an attempt to explicate who the "wrong-doers" are and to determine exactly what the argument (ḥujja) is that these people have.

When the prophet turned towards the Ka'ba after his prayer towards Jerusalem, the polytheists of the people of Mecca said: "According to Muḥammad, his religion has become confused! He turned to you [the Jews] for his qibla, knowing that you were better guided in the path than he. He was on the verge of entering your religion!" So God revealed...[2/150]...<sub>1</sub>

The sabab explains several notions. The verse is post-qibla change and thus has nothing to do with the abrogation of the qibla; this chronological point is made explicit. But more central to the narrative is the polemical motif of sectarian emblems: what is cited by the sabab as the ḥujja is the existence of the Jerusalem qibla, that being the Jewish qibla. The existence of that qibla would have been an argument for everyone, seems to be the implication, had the qibla not been changed to the Ka'ba. The Jerusalem qibla could have been used as a proof against Muḥammad and his relationship to Judaism.

Outside of the asbāb text of al-Suyūṭī, this explanation of the verse gains general consent; indeed, this is the only possibility entertained by al-Ṭabarī.<sup>2</sup> Al-Kalbī, however, puts the focus of the argument elsewhere: it is Ibn Salām, the Jew-converted-to-Islam, who could have had the argument

against Muḥammad had the qibla not been changed. "How is Islam different from Judaism if its obvious sectarian emblem is not different?" seems to be the (undoubtedly authentic) polemical question at issue. The "Wrong-doers" of the verse are then Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf and his companions, along with the polytheist Arabs, who continue to reject Islam, of course, even though they now have no argument. Al-Kalbī managed to state this explanation totally in terms of glosses to the Qurʾān; it is therefore not of particular surprise that the version does not find its way into the asbāb literature.<sup>3</sup>

## Notes to 2/150

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 19 equals al-Ṭabarī III 203, report 2305.
2. Al-Ṭabarī III 201-203, reports 2294-2306; also see al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 92 and al-Qurṭubī II 168-170; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 24b.
3. Al-Kalbī, pp. 16-17; also see al-Wāḥidī, al-Wajīz, p. 40 where the identification as "the Jews" is given and is introduced dhālika anna.



2/153

Oh you who believe!  
 Seek help with patience and prayer!  
 God is with the patient.

Only Berlin 3578 brings forth a sabab for this verse.

The Jews said: "Muhammad will return to our religion just as he will return to our qibla". That was unbearable for the Muslims so (the verse) was revealed as a consolation to them.<sup>1</sup>

The effect of this sabab is to continue the polemical motif of the preceding pericope such that it includes this verse. This is, it would seem, however, a minority opinion, for two other alternatives present themselves in exegetical works. One, the verse is to be taken halakhically, following on verse 152 and its mention of dhikr.<sup>2</sup> Alternatively, the verse can be taken as an introduction to the following verse 154 and its mention of "killing in the way of God".<sup>3</sup> Regardless, the central role of the sabab here once again is to establish exegetical context.

## Notes to 2/153

1. Berlin 3578, f. 9a.
2. E.g., Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 25a; Khams mi'a āya, f. 2b; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 93.
3. E.g., al-Ṭabarī III 213-214 especially his introduction to treatment of 2/154.

2/154 Do not say of those who are  
killed in the way of God: "(They are)  
dead". Rather (say): "(They  
are) living" although you do not know.

In varying detail, all of the asbāb texts connect this verse with those people killed at the Battle of Badr, a number generally reckoned to be fourteen or fifteen. Al-Wāḥidī's report is typical.

The verse was revealed about those (Muslims) who were killed at Badr (of whom there were more than 10); 8 from the Anṣār, 7 from the Muhājirūn. (The occasion of) that (revelation) was that the people were saying of the men killed in the way of God: so-and-so is dead and he has lost the comfort and pleasures of the world. So God revealed this verse.<sup>1</sup>

Al-Suyūṭī specified the person of Tamīm (or 'Umayr) ibn al-Ḥamām as well as "all others killed at Badr" but no special significance seems to be attached to that single name in the literature.<sup>2</sup>

In exegetical works the asbāb are often neglected in favour of seeing the verse as totally general for all martyrs; al-Kalbī is the only person to specify Badr and all other martyrs,<sup>3</sup> while al-Ṭabarī leaves the sabab out all together.<sup>4</sup> Al-Wāḥidī<sup>5</sup> and Muqātil<sup>6</sup> are exceptions to this however. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ emphasizes the point that the reference cannot be to the day of resurrection, because, he explains, the Qur'ān says "You do not know" but we do know that all will live in the hereafter so this verse must refer to a specific condition before that time; al-Jaṣṣāṣ does not, however, cite the sabab to prove the point; it is merely asserted.<sup>7</sup>

## Notes to 2/154

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 40-41; also see his Wajīz, p. 41; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 19; Berlin 3578, f. 9a; al-'Iraqī, ff. 2b-3a.
2. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 19.
3. Al-Kalbī, p. 17.
4. Al-Ṭabarī III 214-219.
5. Al-Wāḥidī, Wajīz, p. 41.
6. Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 25a.
7. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 93-94.

2/158

Al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa are from the sacred emblems of God. He who is on the pilgrimage to the house or who performs the ʿumra, there is no sin on him if he circumambulates the two of them.  
He who volunteers good, God is thankful and knowing.

The phrase "there is no sin on him" (or in other verses, "on you") is a recurring statement in the Qur'ān,<sup>1</sup> often connected through the means of asbāb information to the legitimization of a formerly pagan practice within the Islamic context. For the most part, this verse is no exception. An extremely plentiful number of reports exist which suggest that it was a pagan practice to circumambulate the two hills, but when Islam came the Muslims, for various suggested reasons, were reluctant to follow the habit; this revelation, however, told them that they should circumambulate the hills.

One of the reasons suggested for the Muslims not wanting to circumambulate the hills is that the hills were among the "sacred symbols of Quraysh";<sup>2</sup> another reason was the belief that "the Satans made music between (them) at night".<sup>3</sup> Most common however is the association of al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa with two idols. One of al-Wāḥidī's reports gives a colorful rendition of the notion.

...On al-Ṣafā is the image of a man called Isāf while on al-Marwa was an image of a woman called Nā'ila. The People of the Book claimed that these two had committed adultery in the Ka'ba so God had converted them into stone and placed them on al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa in order to act as a warning and in order to stretch out the period during which they were serving other than God. The people of the Jāhiliya stroked the idols when they circumambulated between them. When Islam came and the idols were broken, the Muslims detested the circumambulation between them because of the idols. So God revealed this verse.<sup>4</sup>

By sketching out the pre-Islamic background, the sabab provides the necessary contrast and context for interpretation.

There is, however, a famous dispute over the reading of this verse. It is sometimes read: "There is no sin on him if he does not circumambulate."<sup>5</sup> This reading is generally defeated by exegetes so inclined by the citation of a report from 'Ā'isha; in the report, someone suggests to her that circumambulation is voluntary, to which she replies that were it so, the verse would read "there is no sin on him if he does not circumambulate." She then goes on to explain that such cannot be the right reading because of the background of the verse, that in the Jāhiliya the people used to circumambulate the mountains. The argument contained in this report is thus that since circumambulation used to be done in the Jāhiliya, this revelation must be seen as a confirmation of the rightness of the practice.<sup>6</sup>

What then is significant is that a whole series of other reports are found for the verse which suggest that, for various reasons, the practice in the Jāhiliya was not to circumambulate the two hills.

The verse was revealed about some of the Anṣār; when they sacrificed, they gave an offering to Manāt in the Jāhiliya, and they were not permitted to circumambulate between al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa. When they arrived there (at the hills) with the Prophet in the ḥajj, they mentioned that to him. So God revealed this verse.<sup>7</sup>

The background to this sabab and, indeed, the whole 'Ā'isha scenario, may well be traceable to a dispute over variant readings and, ultimately, to whether or not circumambulation of the hills was actually required. This latter sabab of not circumambulating in the Jāhiliya would seem to support a reading of not requiring circumambulation in Islam, the

revelation once again confirming a pagan practice and thus being prefaced by the stock phrase "there is no sin on him". In the former sabab of circumambulating in the Jāhiliya, there is support for the reading of requiring circumambulation. The overall picture is not clear-cut for there are traditions from 'A'isha which argue for the required nature of circumambulation but cite the sabab of not circumambulating in the Jāhiliya;<sup>8</sup> such traditions seem to be later convergence of the two trends with the emphasis within the tradition falling on the Quranic "al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa are from the sacred emblems of God" rather than "there is no sin on him if he circumambulates."

Thus the point of the asbāb, exegetically, is simply to establish the previous practice by which the Quranic statement is to be judged. A curious person who read the verse would naturally say to himself "Well, why would there be sin on someone if he circumambulated? Why has the Qur'ān said that?": the sabab provides the haggadic background necessary to quiet curious minds. The sabab would also seem to function in disputes over variant readings. The actual role the sabab plays in supporting the halakhic point of requiring (or not requiring) circumambulation seems open; while the sabab is always cited in one form or another in discussions, ultimately the final proof is derived from the sunna of the prophet who performed the action.

## Notes to 2/158

1. See e.g., Q. 2/198, 229, 230, 233, 234, 235, 236, 240, 282.
2. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 41-42, first report, third report, sixth report; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 20, second report; al-Ṭabarī III 231-236; Mujaḥhid, pp. 92-93; al-Kalbī, p. 17; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 46.
3. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 42, fifth report; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 20, third report similar.
4. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 42, fourth report and in basic thrust, Wajīz, p. 41.
5. See e.g., Ibn Khalawayh, Mukhtaṣar, p. 11.
6. See e.g., Muslim, al-Saḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Ḥajj, p. 644, no. 2923(trans.)--there are numerous other versions; also see Burton, Collection of the Qur'ān, p. 12.
7. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 41, second report; Muqātil, Khams mi'a āya, ff. 28a-28b, where the tradition is connected to the practice of the Ḥums.
8. E.g., Muslim, al-Saḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Ḥajj, pp. 644-645, report 2924(trans.); al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 20; al-Ṭabarī III 236-238, report 2350, 2351; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 46-47; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 95-96.



2/159            Indeed, those who conceal what we have  
                      revealed of signs and guidance after  
                      we have made it clear to the people  
                      in the book, they will be cursed by  
                      God and by those who curse.

This typical verse containing the "concealment" charge brings forth a variety of reports all of which lay the charge at the feet of the people of the book, most especially the Jews. Exactly what is concealed varies in the different interpretations, being either the description of Muḥammad, the mission of Muḥammad, some (unspecified) portion of the Torah or the specific matter of the stoning verse.<sup>1</sup>

A number of the exegetes, however, emphasize the point that the verse is general in application to all those who conceal the truth.<sup>2</sup> Al-Ṭabarī states the matter this way: the verse was revealed fī khāṣṣ about the people (i.e., the Jews and Christians of the time of Muḥammad) but its ma'nā is to all those who conceal the truth; thus division between nazalat fī and ma'nā is one of the devices at the disposal of an exegete and in this instance is an example of a parallel to the Jewish kelal u-ferat.<sup>3</sup> Al-Jaṣṣāṣ also seizes the opportunity to construct a rule of interpretation in this instance; after citing the sabab he goes on to say "the descent of the verse according to a sabab does not prevent one from taking its general sense ('umūm) into account for the remainder of what it implies. This is because, according to us, the ruling is according to the wording (lafz) and not the sabab unless there arises an indication (in our opinion) of necessity of the limitation of it by its sabab".<sup>4</sup> Al-Jaṣṣāṣ thus contrasts the lafz with the sabab and, note, sees the sabab as a limiting device (iqtiṣār) only.

Thus, this verse assumes the burden of more than polemical consideration; it also fulfills the function of halakhic deduction (al-Jaṣṣāṣ

calls his section which discusses this verse "About the forbidding of the concealment of knowledge"). The verse's importance seems to have arisen through its connection with the following verse 160, "Except those who repent, reform and explicate..." which is then interpreted as those who convert to Islam; that is, there is no penalty for Muslims who conceal (unknowingly) the truth.<sup>5</sup> Connected to this, then, is the statement of Abū Hurayra "Had this verse [i.e., verse 160] not (been revealed), I would not transmit anything", obviously out of fear that it may not be true and thus the transmitter would be cursed. Verse 159, combined with verse 160, fulfills a legal function, although not through the application of asbāb material.

## Notes to 2/159

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 42 and Wajīz, p. 41; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 20 equals al-Tabarī III 249-250, report 2370 equals Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 551; Berlin 3578, f. 9b; also al-Kalbī, p. 17; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 25b.
2. Al-Qurṭubī II 185; al-Tabarī III 249-252.
3. Al-Tabarī III 251; see J. Bowker, The Targums and Rabbinic Literature, on the middot of Hillel.
4. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 101.
5. This is considered a case of abrogation by Hibat Allāh, p. 14.

2/163      Your God is one;  
               there is no God but he,  
               the Merciful, the Benificent.

Only Berlin 3578 isolates a sabab for this verse, a sabab which serves to set the stage for the following verse (164) where a sabab is sometimes implied at least for verse 163 as well. Berlin 3578 gives a simple report as follows:

Disbelievers from Quraysh said: "Oh  
 Muhammad, describe to us your lord and  
 his relationship." So the verse was  
 revealed.<sub>1</sub>

This report is also cited by al-Qurṭubī who also cites sūrat al-ikhhlās as being revealed at the same time.<sup>2</sup> As will be seen in the treatment of verse 164 below, this sabab acts to establish the exegetical context and the boundaries of the Quranic pericope. It does not so much affect the meaning of the statements as suggest the haggadic qualities of the text.

## Notes to 2/163

1. Berlin 3578, f. 9b.
2. Al-Qurtubī II 191.

2/164

Behold in the creation of the heavens and the earth;  
 and (in) the distinction between night and day;  
 and (in) the sailing of the ships on the sea for the  
 profit of man;  
 and (in) the rain which God sends down from the heavens  
 to give life to the earth after its death  
 and (in which) he scattered in it of all kinds of animals;  
 and (in) the turning the winds and the clouds following  
 as slaves between the heavens and the earth;  
 Here are the signs for people who are wise.

Verse 164 is always considered within the asbāb material, it would seem, as being post-verse 163, although whether verse 163 fits into the disputation/prophetical evidence motifs of verse 164 is, as suggested above, left open and the connection between the two verses in this way remains a concern primarily of a haggadic nature and not of necessary contextual continuity. Verse 163 was either a spontaneous assertion by God of his unicity or an assertion to answer polytheistic enquiries; verse 164 is then a reply to (possible further) enquiries which are generally said to have been one of two possibilities: either that the polytheists demanded proof (often through turning stone into gold) of the assertion made in verse 163 or that they questioned how one god could be sufficient to run the affairs of the world. Such possibilities are found in al-Wāḥidī,<sup>1</sup> al-Suyūṭī<sup>2</sup> and Berlin 3578,<sup>3</sup> along with al-Ṭabarī<sup>4</sup> and al-Qurṭubī<sup>5</sup> while Sufyān al-Thawrī<sup>6</sup> and Muqātil<sup>7</sup> limit their material to demands for signs only. Al-Ṭabarī has one report which elaborates the sign motif within a polemical motif, with Quraysh asking the Jews and Christians in turn for the evidences of their prophets and then confronting Muḥammad with the challenge.<sup>8</sup> The underlying motif of all these reports is haggadic, with emphasis on the narrative nature of the revelation.

Finally, note must be taken of al-Ṭabarī's use of the term sabab with anzala allāh: اختلف اهل التاويل في السبب من اجله انزل الله  
9. تعالى ذكر هذه الآية على نبيه

Once again, the technical sense is developing but is clearly not yet fully established, judging by the evidence of the wording min ajlihi and dhikr, which interfere with the straightforward "technical" statement fa-anzala allāh or simply sabab, both of which include by implication the full statement by al-Ṭabarī.

## Notes to 2/164

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 43; also see his Wajīz, p. 42 for just the demand for proof.
2. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, pp. 20-21 (equals al-Ṭabarī reports 2401, 2404).
3. Berlin 3578, f. 9b.
4. Al-Ṭabarī III 267-270.
5. Al-Qurṭubī II 191-192.
6. Sufyān al-Thawrī, p. 14.
7. Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 26a.
8. Al-Ṭabarī III 269-270, report 2403; note that in the report Muḥammad asks his lord who then "discloses" awḥā to him that indeed he could turn stones into gold, but it would be of no use; he then "reveals" anzala the Quranic verse; the distinction between the two, once again, displays an aspect of the establishment of technical terminology as found in and as developed by al-Ṭabarī.
9. Al-Ṭabarī III 267.



2/168      Oh People!  
 Eat of what is in the earth  
 (which is) lawful and good.  
 Do not follow the path of  
 Satan for he is a  
 clear enemy of yours.

Al-Wāḥidī,<sup>1</sup> al-ʿIrāqī<sup>2</sup> and Berlin 3578<sup>3</sup> but not, significantly, al-Suyūṭī cite basically the same report for this verse, the following being the version of al-Wāḥidī:

The verse was revealed about Thaqīf, Khusāʿa and ʿAmir ibn Saʿsaʿa who forbade for themselves cultivated produce, grazing livestock and forbade the Baḥīra, Sāʿiba, Waṣīla and Ḥāmī camels.

The citation of the four kinds of camels, those which are specifically mentioned as permitted in Q. 5/103, fits this passage in with many other passages where the Quranic legislation is contrasted with pagan practice, in order to justify the Quranic teaching in a sense. This, as Wansbrough has noted, is a constant in exegesis.<sup>4</sup>

The sabab does not function in any specifically halakhic way for, as al-Qurṭubī claims after having cited the sabab, the verse is to be taken as a general statement and not specifically limited to those items listed in the sabab;<sup>5</sup> al-Jaṣṣāṣ and Ibn al-ʿArabī do not even treat the verse in their halakhic works.

The fact that al-Suyūṭī does not cite a sabab for the verse is of little surprise; the connection between the verse and the revelation is exegetical and not causal, the latter being, according to al-Suyūṭī, the only "true" sabab.

## Notes to 2/168

1. Al-Wāhidī, Asbab, pp. 43-44; also Wajīz, p. 43.
2. Al-ʿIrāqī, f. 3a; he does not name the camels involved.
3. Berlin 3578, f. 9b.
4. See QS 16-17, 93-98 and passim: the concept of "Jāhilī foil".
5. Al-Qurtubī II 207; al-Tabarī III 300 cites the notion of the four camels but does not give any reports to support this interpretation.

2/170

When it is said to them :  
 "Follow what God has revealed",  
 they say: "Rather, we follow what  
 we found our fathers (doing)"  
 even if their fathers  
 understood nothing and were not guided.

Only al-Suyūṭī among the asbāb texts cites a report for this  
 verse:

The prophet called the Jews to Islam, excited an  
 interest in them of it and warned them of the  
 punishment of God and his revenge. Rāfi' ibn  
 Huraymila and Mālik ibn 'Awf said: "But we  
 follow, oh Muḥammad, what our fathers gave us  
 of it. They were more knowledgeable and better  
 than us." So God revealed about that...[2/170]...<sub>1</sub>

This report is quoted from the Sīra of Ibn Ishāq and is also  
 found in al-Ṭabarī.<sup>2</sup> In al-Qurṭubī,<sup>3</sup> the plain gloss that this verse  
 refers to the Jews is found. Indeed, it is the identification of the referent  
 of "to them" that is the major function of this sabab although some  
 controversy is encountered in the matter: the "them" may refer back to the  
 "oh people" of verse 168 where the pagans are often seen to be the referent.  
 This point is made clear by al-Ṭabarī's exposition of the two wajh to  
 the interpretation of the verse, although he sees verse 168 in a general  
 sense in this case and opposes that to the specific notion of the Jews (as  
 supported by the sabab) as referent.<sup>5</sup> It is apparent that the asbāb  
 material can complicate the exegetical procedure as well as elucidate it;  
 it may well be for this reason that only al-Suyūṭī includes the sabab  
 and does so with little consideration of exegetical context.<sup>6</sup>

## Notes to 2/170

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 21.
2. Al-Ṭabarī III 305-306, reports 2446, 2447 with some confusion over the names; Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 552.
3. Al-Qurṭubī II 210-211.
4. See e.g., al-Kalbī, p. 18.
5. Al-Ṭabarī III 304-305.
6. Cf., the treatment in Tafsīr al-Jalālayn, p. 34.

2/174

Those who conceal what God reveals  
of the book and sell it for  
a small price, those are the ones who  
will eat in their bellies only fire.  
God will not speak to them on the day  
of resurrection nor purify them.  
(There will be) a greivous penalty for them.

This verse which follows after the first major Quranic verse concerning food laws, for which there is no sabab, is a typical verse reiterating the polemical charge of concealment of material in the revealed books, virtually always glossed as the Torah, as has been seen in many other verses previously. Asbāb reports are found in al-Suyūṭī and al-Wāḥidī as well as in most exegetes. The basic thrust of all the reports is that the Jews concealed the description of Muḥammad and his mission as found in the Torah;<sup>1</sup> the Jews guilty of this concealment are sometimes named, Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf and Ibn Ṣūriyā being among the most popular.<sup>2</sup>

Al-Wāḥidī's report, which is also given by al-Suyūṭī as his second report, is typical of these concealment motif reports, but also displays to a significant extent a certain concern for employment of Quranic vocabulary within the report:

(The verse) was revealed about the chiefs and the learned ones of the Jews who used to acquire from their common people gifts and surplus (produce). They used to hope that the foretold prophet would be from among them. When (the prophet) was sent from other than them, they feared the loss of their foodstuffs and the end of their status. So they went to the description of Muḥammad and changed it; then they took it to (the people) and said: "This is the character of the prophet who will come at the end of time. The description of this prophet who is in Mecca does not resemble it." The common people saw the changed description (and) found it different from the description of Muḥammad, so they did not follow him.<sup>3</sup>

Now the charges of kitmān as in the Quranic verse and of tahrīf as in the sabab are obviously closely related and in fact are seemingly interchangeable; only perhaps in the matter of the "concealed" stoning penalty for adultery is kitmān elaborated in any sort of literal way. Nevertheless, what is significant in this sabab is, as suggested above, the use of Quranic vocabulary in the report and what is involved is the concretization of what would seem to be metaphorical images; more precisely, the Quranic phrases: "...and sell it for a small price, these are they who will eat in their bellies...", are made into substantive elements: out of concern for the value of the foodstuffs which the Jewish leaders receive, they change the description of Muḥammad in order to be able to eat. As in other instances the (apparently) metaphorical images of the Qur'ān are explained as grounded in "history".

## Notes to 2/174

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 44, also Wajīz, p. 44; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 21, first report equals al-Ṭabarī report 2497, second report equals al-Wāḥidī; al-Ṭabarī III 327-328, reports 2494-2497; al-Qurṭubī II 234.
2. E.g., al-Kalbī, p. 19; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 26b.
3. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 44.

2/177      Righteousness is not turning your faces  
towards east or west but (the  
possessor of) righteousness is he who  
believes in God and the last day and the  
angels and the book and the messengers...

The concerns of the asbāb reports for this verse are quite plainly not related to the basic exegetical concern in the verse, that is, the equation of birr "righteousness" with dhū'l-birr "possessor of righteousness" but, rather, related to what would appear to be more of a halakhic impulse, but even there in a negative way. What the asbāb reports have in common is elimination of this verse from actual disputes about the qibla as such; this verse does not, the asbāb reports imply, state that the direction of prayer does not matter as such--God has not given free license to face whichever direction one likes; rather the whole verse is situated after the change of the qibla and centers on different disputes, of which there are two possibilities.

The first and most popular report puts the verse within the framework of a naskh dispute but, most emphatically, places it after the change of the qibla:

It was reported that a man asked the prophet about righteousness. So God revealed this verse. (The question was about) a man before the imposition of the ritual obligations, having (however) witnessed that there was no God but God and that Muḥammad was his slave and messenger. (The man) died in this state. (Would) paradise be his reward? So God revealed this verse.<sup>1</sup>

This sabab reflects a motif previously seen of the status of those who died prior to the change of qibla; the underlying question is one of the principle of naskh: If the rules of the game can be changed, what is the status of those from before the change? The question is probably one of inter-religious dispute in origin, but here it is seen as internally Islamic.



A second sabab sees the verse quite differently:

The Jews prayed facing the west.  
The Christians prayed facing the east.  
So the verse was revealed.<sup>2</sup>

Here, the focus of the debate is over the status of Judaism and Christianity, the statement being made that those two religions are not the containers of righteousness but, rather, Islam is.

Both of these asbāb reports of course contain common polemical motifs which are developed in many other verses of the Qur'ān as well. In the treatment of this verse, it also occurs that the two motifs--abrogation and direction of prayer--are brought together on one sabab, as in al-Ṭabarī<sup>3</sup> where the second report as given above, simply follows on from the first, although the connection between the two is left ambiguous. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ<sup>4</sup> does likewise by means of his statement that the verse concerned the Jews and the Christians "when they rejected the abrogation of the qibla".

Finally, it is worth noting that al-Ṭabarī prefers the Jewish-Christian interpretation on the basis of the context (siyāq) of the passage.<sup>5</sup> The sabab acts to incorporate a verse into a given context, although in this case as in many others, the choice of the context must be made first and then supported ex post facto by choosing an appropriate sabab.

## Notes to 2/177

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 44 and Wajīz, p. 45; Berlin 3578, ff. 9b-10a; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 21, second report; al-Ṭabarī III 338, report 2519 but cf. below at note 3; al-Qurṭubī II 237.
2. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 21, first report; al-Ṭabarī III 337-338, reports 2518-2520.
3. Al-Ṭabarī III 338, report 2519.
4. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 130-131.
5. Al-Ṭabarī III 338 bottom.

2/178

Oh you who believe!  
 Retaliation is prescribed for you in murder,  
 the free-man for the free-man,  
 the slave for the slave,  
 the woman for the woman.  
 Someone who is forgiven anything by his brother,  
 (he should) follow (it) with honour and  
 a payment to him (given) with kindness.  
 That is a lightening from your Lord and a mercy.  
 He who provokes after that, (there will be) a  
 grave penalty for him.

The asbāb material for this verse displays the concern, common to many other reports concerned with halakhic verses, to provide the pre-Islamic background either pagan or Jewish, those always being interchangeable. This background is given generally not for halakhic reasons, it would seem, but rather for haggadic ones. In this instance, however, the sabab also seeks, through the same means, to expand the notion of the "lightening" presented in the verse.

The majority of reports for this verse sees the verse as a response to a pre-Islamic Arabian practice of unequal retaliation for murder, such that a man would be killed for a woman and so forth. Al-Suyūṭī explains that the situation even continued into Islamic times, some people not having gained compensation by the time they converted. The verse was thus revealed to correct the unequal-retaliation principle.<sup>1</sup>

Within the asbāb texts, this is the only report found; within exegetical and ḥadīth works, however, the range expands somewhat. Al-Bukhārī, and from him al-Qurṭubī, report that while the Jews had the law of retaliation, they had no system of blood-money. Thus the Islamic system was a "lightening" within a polemical framework.<sup>2</sup>

Al-Ṭabarī presents another possibility: that, in fact, equal retaliation was what was done in olden times, and God confirmed the rule in the Qur'ān.<sup>3</sup> All these possibilities present the same basic impulse:

to establish the previous halakhic practice, the motivation for which, as stated above, seems not to be to elucidate the legal ruling implied in the verse so much as to provide colour and context to the passage in question.

## Notes to 2/178

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 44 and Wajīz, pp. 45-46; Berlin 3578, f. 10a; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 22; al-Ṭabarī III 358-361, reports 2558-2571 in basic substance; al-Qurṭubī II 244; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 65; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f.27a and Khams mi'a āya, ff.37a-37b; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 135; the same understanding is presented in the naskh texts, Hibat Allāh, pp. 15-16, al-Naḥḥās, pp. 17-19, where the problem is raised of whether this verse is abrogated by Q. 5/45 ('A life for a life') as claimed by the Hanifites (such that unequal retaliation is actually allowable in Islam).
2. Al-Bukhārī, al-Sahīḥ, Kitāb al-Tafsīr VI 22-23; al-Qurṭubī II 244; also Muqātil, Khams mi'a āyā, f. 38a, where comparison with both Jewish and Christian dispensations is invoked.
3. Al-Ṭabarī III 362-363, report 2572.

2/184 (Fasting for) a fixed number of days.  
 He who from among you is sick or on  
 a journey, then a number of other days  
 and for those who are able, a redemption  
 is food for a poor person.  
 He who volunteers more, that is  
 better for him.  
 It is better for you that you fast  
 if only you knew!

According to al-Suyūṭī, in a report taken from Ibn Sa'd's Tabaqāt, this verse was revealed about "the client of Qays ibn al-Sā'ib; 'and for those who are able, a redemption is food for a poor person', he broke the fast and fed a poor person each day."<sup>1</sup>

This is the extent of the information found in the asbāb works on this verse, a situation which is somewhat surprising considering the wealth of information which is found, for example, in al-Ṭabarī.<sup>2</sup> The fact that the piece of the verse which al-Suyūṭī quotes is sometimes considered to be abrogated by verse 185, "He who is present among you for the month should (spend it) fasting," that is, that there is no alternate provision, may be significant.<sup>3</sup> It is, thus, perhaps the intent of the sabab to imply that the ruling of verse 184 was being misused, that people would not try hard enough to fast for the entire period but rather would choose to feed a poor person. Indeed, the same basic report which is found in al-Suyūṭī is found in al-Naḥḥās although it is minus the identification of the person involved. On the other hand, the redemption provision may not be abrogated at all but rather it is to be taken as majāz according to al-Naḥḥās,<sup>4</sup> being a provision only for those who are otherwise unable to fast.

Overall, however, it seems that the role of the sabab is minimal; while it may find its application within the context of an understanding of abrogation in the verse, that would hardly seem to be its central role.

## Notes to 2/184

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 22.
2. Al-Ṭabarī II 419-434; much of this information here is a continuation of matters from verse 183 where extensive material is given concerning the phrase "as it was prescribed for those before you" and the background to the fast of Ramaḍān; all this material, note, is excluded from the asbāb texts as well.
3. E.g., Hibat Allāh, pp. 18-19; al-Naḥḥās, p. 22; al-Bukhārī, al-Sahīḥ, Kitāb al-Tafsīr VI 25-27; al-Ṭabarī III 419-427; al-Qurtubī II 287-288; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 79-80; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 176-177; al-Kalbī, p. 20.
4. Al-Naḥḥās, p. 23; also see al-Ṭabarī III 427-434; al-Qurtubī II 288-289; Mujāhid, p. 97; Sufyān al-Thawrī, p. 16.

2/186      When my servants ask you about me,  
              indeed I am close.  
              I respond to the prayer of the one who prays  
              when he prays to me.  
              So let them respond to me and believe  
              in me; perhaps they will be rightly guided.

The asbāb material for this, even though the entire verse is left out of al-Wāḥidī, is quite extensive. Virtually all the reports indicate the same basic haggadic concern: to specify the party intended by the words "my servants" and to determine exactly what it was that was asked.

Five basic questions are suggested as the impulse behind this verse, each assigned to a different party of enquirers:

1.      a bedouin asked: "Is our Lord close so that we may whisper to him or is he far so that we should shout?"<sup>1</sup>
2.      the companions asked: "Where is our Lord?"<sup>2</sup>
3.      a man asked after the revelation of Q. 40/60 ("Call to me, I will respond to you"): "How is it that our Lord hears our prayer?"<sup>3</sup>
4.      "they" asked, once again after the revelation of Q. 40/60 :  
          "We do not know at what time to call";<sup>4</sup> a variation has "If only we knew at what time".<sup>5</sup>
5.      the Jews asked: "How can our Lord hear our prayers (if it is true) as you claim that between us and heaven is a (travelling) distance of 500 years?"<sup>6</sup>

From the point of view of form criticism it is probably significant to note that in four of these five questions, God is referred to as "our Lord" (even in the case of the Bedouin); the likelihood of the influence of the phraseology of Q. 40/60 with its reference to "Your Lord" on all of these reports, regardless of their actual content seems probable; very few other asbāb reports in reference to sūra 2 use this appellation for God in their phraseology.



Two reports found in al-Qurṭubī, however, seem to display more concern for contextual niceties than simply for a good tale. One report from Muqātil about ʿUmar and other anonymous reports, implicitly about ʿUmar, recount the story of ʿUmar's error in sleeping with his wife during the fast (until this prohibition was annulled in verse 187<sup>7</sup>); upon learning of his mistake, ʿUmar was grieved. So God revealed this verse as a comfort to ʿUmar, to let him know that the situation was going to be responded to, and thus as a prelude to the revelation of verse 187.<sup>8</sup> Thus the pericope is widened in scope by having "fasting" as the topic for all the verses 184 through 187, and the narrative context more closely defined.

## Notes to 2/186

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 22, first report; Berlin 3578, f. 10a, third report; al-Ṭabarī III 480, report 2904; al-Qurṭubī II 308, fourth report. Cf. al-Wāḥidī, Wajīz, p. 48 where some of the ṣaḥāba ask the same question.
2. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 22, second report; Berlin 3578, f. 10a, first report; al-Ṭabarī III 481-482, report 2905.
3. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 22, third report; al-Ṭabarī III 482, report 2906.
4. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 22, fourth report; al-Qurṭubī II 308, fifth report.
5. Al-Ṭabarī III 482, reports 2907, 2908; Sufyān al-Thawrī, p. 17.
6. Berlin 3578, f. 10a, second report; al-Qurṭubī II 308, third report, attributed to al-Kalbī in whose tafsīr the gloss ahl al-kitāb is made to "my servants".
7. See below, pp. 287-291.
8. Al-Qurṭubī II 308, first and second reports; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 28b, and Khams mi'a āya, f. 22a,

2/187

Permitted to you on the night of the fast is intercourse with your wives. They are a garment to you and you are a garment to them. God knows that you used to betray yourselves and he has turned to you and forgiven you. So sleep with them now and seek what God has ordained for you. And eat and drink until the white thread appears to you distinct from the black thread (at) dawn. Then complete your fast until the night appears. Do not have intercourse with them while you are withdrawn into the mosques. These are the rules of God. Do not approach them. In that way God explains his signs to the people. Perhaps they will be fearful.

This long verse produces a very large number of asbāb reports, the verse being divided, generally, into several different parts. As in most other cases of halakhic verses, the concern seems to be to establish the legal background against which the Quranic regulation is to be viewed.

The main report for the verse is a tradition generally recounted about ʿUmar, although sometimes reported anonymously simply about "some men". The basic practice during Ramaḍān had been to avoid sexual relations totally; cheating, however, took place, thus the law was revealed allowing intercourse during the night. ʿUmar is often given as the person for whom this provision was particularly relevant.<sup>1</sup> A slight variant on this suggests that the previous practice was not to have sex after having fallen asleep at night.<sup>2</sup>

A competing sabab sees the problem more as revolving around food and drink. Qays ibn Ṣirma al-Anṣārī is the main protagonist in this scenario. Once again, the previous practice had been that if those fasting did not eat before they fell asleep at night then they could not eat at all that night. Qays cheated and the verse was revealed.<sup>3</sup>

Attempts by exegetes to resolve the conflict between these two different reports have left their traces in the asbāb material it would seem;

another sabab is found that simply combines the two reports into one:

'Umar slept with his wife who had, however, fallen asleep earlier and Şirma ibn Anas fell asleep without having eating. Both of these events seem primarily relevant to the background notion that falling asleep before partaking of food, drink or sex was what was previously prohibited.<sup>4</sup>

Exegetically, the separation of the two reports was generally accepted and handled in the following way in, for example, Ibn al-'Arabī:

"So sleep with them now", meaning, God has permitted to you what he had forbidden to you. This indicates that the sabab of the verse was the intercourse of 'Umar and not the hunger of Qays because if the sabab was the hunger of Qays, then he would have said "So eat now" at the beginning (of the verse) because the important thing about which the verse was revealed need not be its major portion.

But Ibn al-'Arabī continues later on in his analysis:

"Eat and Drink". This is the answer revealed to Qays ibn Şirma while the first was the answer revealed to 'Umar. (The verse) began with the revelation about 'Umar because the important matter precedes.<sup>5</sup>

What occurs here, quite obviously, is that the verse is fragmented in order to accept both asbāb trends into the exegesis. Now, as stated above, what these asbāb reports do is provide background information about previous practice and are thus loosely related to the notion of abrogation. Naskh in this sense, it is to be noted, must be taken in a very wide sense, for this is plainly not a matter of intra-Quranic abrogation but of implied abrogation by the Qur'ān of previous practice at the best.<sup>6</sup> The sabab certainly serves to establish this abrogation although one is entitled to wonder whether the asbab reports did not as a consequence of their very existence produce the notion of necessary abrogation, while

the sabab had been adduced in the first place to provide the basic background narrative, which is essentially a haggadic function. That, on the other hand, the sabab does provide exegetical material of a halakhic nature must be admitted; the sabab does provide bounteous material to explain that al-rafath and bāshara do indeed refer to sexual intercourse (waga'a and ghasā are used as glosses; it is also phrased negatively in some instances). One may doubt, however, that the linguistic niceties were ever really in question.<sup>7</sup>

The verse as a whole is also the occasion for further anecdotes. The matter of distinguishing the white thread from the black thread seems to have provoked a situation reminiscent of New Testament episodes where Jesus queries the understanding of his own followers. Various reports are found, for example in al-Bukhārī,<sup>8</sup> indicating that people took the notion of the white and black threads literally, tying such threads to their legs or putting them under their pillows or simply asking Muḥammad about it. According to one report, it was the revelation of the words "of the dawn" that cleared up the whole matter and made people realize that these threads were metaphors.<sup>9</sup> Other reports are more humorous, having Muḥammad ridicule his followers for such simplicity. Once again these reports have an exegetical function with legal application, providing a more precise rendering of the legal rules.

Finally, a report arises for the phrase "Do not have intercourse with them while you are withdrawn into the mosques." Once again, the intent of the sabab is to provide the background, to establish the fact that at one time the deed was done. According to al-Suyūṭī:

When a man withdrew by himself [into the mosque], he would go out of the mosque and have intercourse when he wished. So (the phrase) was revealed.<sup>10</sup>

Overall, the asbāb reports for this verse indicate what would seem to be a lack of concern with contextual matters in this instance, the exegetes being quite prepared to divide the verse into three, if not four, separate passages for exegesis. The material provided has as its main aim, apparently, to describe the previous practice in order to put the Quranic ruling into its proper sphere of human activity and relationship.

## Notes to 2/187

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 45, first report; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 23, third report, anonymous; al-Ṭabarī III 497-498, reports 2942-2943; al-Qurṭubī II 315, third and fourth reports.
2. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 45, second report involving Qays ibn Ṣirma and ʿUmar; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 23, first and fourth report; al-ʿIraqī, ff. 3a-3b; Berlin 3578, f. 10a, first report; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 28b; Sufyān al-Thawrī, pp. 17-18; al-Ṭabarī III 493, report 2935 and III 501-503, report 2950 from al-Suddī which places the matter against the background of Christianity, the believers of that community having fasted in Ramaḍān (sic) and practised total abstention during the night as well as during the day.
3. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 45-46, third report; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 23, second report; Berlin 3578, f. 10a, second report; al-Ṭabarī III 494-495, reports 2936-2939; al-Qurṭubī II 314, second report.
4. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 46, fourth report; al-Ṭabarī III 496, report 2940; al-Qurṭubī II 314, first report.
5. Ibn al-ʿArabī I 91, sixth and eighth questions; also al-Qurṭubī II 318; see al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 226-227 who deals with the verse in a much more general fashion. Cf., the explanation of Hibat Allāh, p. 18, "The episode of Ṣirma preceded that of ʿUmar but God began with the story of ʿUmar because the sin of intercourse is greater than that in eating or drinking."
6. See al-Naḥḥās pp. 24-25; Hibat Allāh, pp. 17-18; also see al-Qurṭubī II 314: "The word 'permitted' demands that it was forbidden before that, then abrogated"; such a general statement would hardly stand up to rigorous applicaton (cf., e.g., Q. 5/4); it is significant however that appeal to the sabab is not made to prove the point.
7. Note that rafath is found as an entry in Ibn ʿAbbās, al-Lughāt fī'l-Qur'ān, p. 18 and see my "Ibn ʿAbbās's al-Lughāt fī'l-Qur'ān" BSOAS, XLIV (1981). It is also worthy of note that al-Ṭabarī presents a series of simple statements equating rafath and jimāʿ with no attempt to use the narrative sabab for such purposes (see III 482-488) and likewise with bāshara (III 504-505).
8. Al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Tafsīr VI 28-30; also al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 46-47; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, pp. 23-24; Berlin 3578, f. 10a; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 228-229 (using the phrase majāz wa istiʿāra); Ibn al-ʿArabī I 92; al-Ṭabarī III 510-539--al-Ṭabarī has much more information than the simple ḥadīth material reported elsewhere, much of which reflects a halakhic concern for precision as to the exact time of dawn and dusk.

9. This may actually be an attempt to explain why min al-fajr comes after al-khayt al-abyad where it hardly belongs.
10. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 24; al-Ṭabarī III 540-542, reports 3037-3048--al-Ṭabarī also presents the possibility that bāshara here means more than jimā alone; al-Kalbī, pp. 20-21 specifies 'Alī as the person involved in this.



2/188      Do not consume your property among yourselves  
in vanity nor offer it to the judges in order  
to consume in sin a part of the  
property of the people while you are knowing.

The asbāb texts are uniform in presenting the basic scenario of  
the narrative background to this verse; the fullest version, however, is  
found in Muqātil's Tafsīr:

That was that Imru'l-Qays ibn 'Ābis and 'Ibdān  
ibn Ashwa' al-Ḥaḍramī had a dispute about some  
land. Imru'l-Qays was the debtor, 'Ibdān the  
owed. 'Ibdān had no evidence; Imru'l-Qays wanted  
to swear an oath. The prophet recited to them  
Q. 3/77 ("Those who sell the covenant of God  
and their oaths for a small price, they shall have  
no portion in the hereafter".) When Imru'l-Qays  
heard that, he regretted having sworn the oath  
about it and did not dispute with him about his  
land and he made (Muḥammad) arbitrator over it.  
So God revealed...[2/188]...<sub>1</sub>

Neither this report nor any specific detail from it finds its  
way into al-Jaṣṣāṣ<sup>2</sup> or Ibn al-'Arabī<sup>3</sup> while al-Qurtubī<sup>4</sup> who cites the report  
in a brief fashion ("Ibdān and Imru'l-Qays disputed before the prophet;  
Imru'l-Qays disliked that and wished to swear an oath. So God revealed  
this verse.") makes it quite clear that he considers the verse to be addressed  
to the entire community of Muḥammad. For halakhic deduction, therefore,  
the sabab plays no role, it would seem, even though the potential for such  
would certainly seem to be there, especially in the full account as found  
in Muqātil's Tafsīr.

The brief nature of the reports as found in the asbāb books--al-  
Wāḥidī and Berlin 3578 present an account much like al-Qurtubī's; al-  
Suyūṭī's is even shorter--perhaps indicates an awareness on the part of  
these authors of the non-halakhic relevance of the material and that the  
reports they are citing are mostly anecdotal or at best exegetical.

## Notes to 2/188

1. Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 29a and Khams mi'a āya, ff. 38a-38b actually in reference to Q. 4/29 where there is identical phraseology; also see al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, p. 47; Berlin 3578, ff. 10a-10b; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 24; al-Kalbī, p. 21 simply states nazalat fī Imru'l-Qays wa Ibdān.
2. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 250-254.
3. Ibn al-ʿArabī I 96-98.
4. Al-Qurṭubī II 337-338.

2/189a            They are asking you about the new moons.  
                      Say, they are appointed times for the people  
                      and the pilgrimage.

This part of the verse, often taken to be a statement about the divine sanction which the lunar calendar receives in the Qur'ān, gathers about it a selection of asbāb reports ranging from the simple to the substantially more complex.

Both al-Suyūṭī and al-Ṭabarī give a report which states: "the people asked the prophet about the new moons, so the verse was revealed."<sup>1</sup> Simple to the point of inane, this report does serve to establish the notion that the verse is not to be considered as a prophecy (that is, "you will be asked") but rather as a response to a situation (that is, "you have been asked"), implying that a perfect meaning is to be given to the imperfect verb found in the verse. It must be admitted, however, that this point is not made explicit in the commentaries consulted.

A second report shifts the focus slightly, with "the people" asking "Oh prophet, why were the new moons created?" to which the verse is the obvious response.<sup>2</sup> A third report continues in the same vein but enters into the Jewish-Muslim debate, with Mu'ādh ibn Jabl complaining to the prophet that "the Jews came to us, causing our questions about the new moons to increase"; so the verse was revealed.<sup>3</sup> The specification of Mu'ādh, of course, indicates a greater concern in the third report for the identification of the unknown, "they were asking". The second report really adds only a little more detail to the first report and can be considered anecdotal at best.

The fourth report for this half-verse, however, is more extensive:

Mu'ādh ibn Jabl and Tha'laba ibn Ghanama said: "Oh prophet, why is that the new moon is just visible, then it appears small like a needle then brightens until it is strong, (then) leveling off and circling, then starting to decrease and getting smaller, until it returns just as it was. Why does it not (remain at) a single level?" So...[2/189a]...was revealed.<sub>4</sub>

This report, while more substantial than the other reports, presents the same picture of the naïveté of some early Muslims, wondering about celestial motion with a child-like innocence. The point of such reports as this is difficult to determine, but is probably to be accounted for by the haggadic impulse for a good yarn.

## Notes to 2/189a

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 24, first report; al-Ṭabarī III 554, report 3073.
2. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 24, second report; al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 47, second report; Berlin 3578, f. 10b, third report; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 98-99; al-Ṭabarī III 553-554, reports 3067, 3068, 3070.
3. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 47, first report; Berlin 3578, f. 10b, second report; also see al-Kalbī, p. 21; al-Qurṭubī II 341 has this report but has it run into the next report, forming a single unit--al-Wāḥidī and Berlin 3578 are quite explicit in separating the two however.
4. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 47, third report and briefly in Wajīz, p. 50; Berlin 3578, f. 10b, first report; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 24, third report; al-ʿIrāqī, f. 3b; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 29a, Khams mi'a āya, f. 25a; al-Qurṭubī II 341.

2/189b      It is not piety to enter houses from their rear.  
               But piety is the fear of God and entering  
               houses by their doors.  
               Fear God, perhaps you will prosper.

There is a total agreement among the exegetes, in one sense at least, that this verse was revealed about people who did not enter their houses through the door but rather through the rear, when they were in the state of ihram. Several of the asbab reports state precisely no more than that and then imply that this verse was revealed in order to remove any sanction for the necessity of such a practice.<sup>1</sup> Such is certainly the essence of most of the hadith reports found on the verse; the intention of the sabab is once again, it would seem, simply to provide the background colour for the verse.

A larger series of asbab reports, however, is found concerning the practices of the pre-Islamic group, the Hums. It has been pointed out especially by Wansbrough<sup>2</sup> that the type of information found concerning the Hums (and other similar pre-Islamic groups) is totally exegetical: what has been "preserved" is only what is relevant to understanding the Qur'ān and hadith. This is certainly true for any details concerning Hums and entering houses in ihram, and it is a notion which is only emphasized by the discovery that, in fact, contradictory information is preserved concerning Hums and this activity: they either did or did not enter their houses from the rear, depending on the report. A typical narrative is the following from al-Suyūṭī:

The Quraysh were called the Hums and they used to enter their houses in ihram while the Anṣār and the rest of the Arabs did not enter by the door in ihram. While the prophet was in a garden, he went out of the door and Qutba ibn 'Amir al-Anṣārī went out with him. They said: "Oh prophet, Qutba is an immoral man; he has gone out of the door

with you." The (Prophet) said to him: "What prompted you to do this?" He said: "I saw you doing it, so I did as you did". (The prophet) said: "I am of the Ḥums", to which he responded: "My religion is your religion!" So God revealed...[2/189b]... 3

The figure of Qutba often reckons in variations on this story, but also a person thought to have been named Rifā'a ibn Tābūt<sup>4</sup> is sometimes cited.

But precisely the opposite point is made in some sources; one such report is found in al-'Irāqī, al-Ṭabarī and, most explicitly, al-Azraqī (d. about 220) as found in Guillaume's translation of the Sīra:

If one of (the Ḥums) before and at the beginning of Islam was in ihram and was one of the housedwellers, i.e., living in houses or villages, he would dig a hole at the back of his house and go in and out by it and not enter by the door...The year of Ḥudaybiya the prophet entered his house. One of the Anṣār was with him and he stopped at the door, explaining that he was one of the Ḥums. The prophet said: "I am one of the Ḥums too, My religion and your religion are the same", so the Anṣarī went into the house by the door as he saw the prophet do.<sup>5</sup>

Exegetically, whether the Ḥums did or did not enter the doors matters very little of course; the point of the sabab is clearly to answer that perpetual question of why: Why does the Qur'ān mention such a thing as how to enter one's house, a notion probably quite foreign to those involved in the development of the exegetical tradition? The sabab, once again, responds to the basic haggadic impulse.

## Notes to 2/189b

1. Al-Bukhārī, al-Sahīh, Kitāb al-Tafsīr VI 30; al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, p. 48, first report and Wajīz, p. 50; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 24, first report and third report; Berlin 3578, f. 10b, first report; al-Ṭabarī III 556-560, reports 3075, 3076, 3080, 3084, 3088; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 100-101 but somewhat more extensive; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 256.
2. See QS 16-17.
3. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 24, second report; al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, p. 48, second report; Berlin 3578, f. 10b, second report; al-Ṭabarī III 559-560, report 3087; Muqātil, Tafsīr, ff. 29a-29b; al-Qurṭubī II 345.
4. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 24, third report; al-Ṭabarī III 556, report 3077.
5. A. Guillaume, The Life of Muhammad, p. 89 somewhat modified; al-ʿIrāqī, f. 3b; al-Ṭabarī III 559, report 3085; also see W. M. Watt, "Hums", EI<sup>2</sup> III 576-577.



2/190      Fight in the way of God those who fight you  
              but do not commit excesses.  
              God does not like those who commit excesses.

All of the asbāb texts agree on the report for this verse, the following being the version as found in al-Suyūṭī:

(The verse was revealed) about the treaty of Ḥudaybiya, when the prophet turned away from the house (i.e., Mecca) and the polytheists made a treaty with him such that he could return the next year. When it was the next year, he and his companions were prepared for the "fulfilled pilgrimage" but they feared that Quraysh would prevent them from that, and would stop them from entering the mosque and kill them. His companions disliked (the idea of) fighting them in the holy month. So...[2/190]... was revealed.<sup>1</sup>

The basic event related in this sabab is familiar enough from the Sīra and the Maghāzī although in neither of those texts is the revelation of the verse connected with the account.<sup>2</sup>

In the various legal analyses of the verse, the lack of attention paid to the sabab and the whole historical episode is striking; conclusions about the implications of the verse are simply not drawn out through analysis of history.<sup>3</sup> Discussion of the abrogation of the verse in Hibat Allāh and al-Naḥḥās remains isolated from the sabab with neither author quoting the information.<sup>4</sup> Al-Ṭabarī does not quote the sabab either, and conducts his discussion in general terms, first presenting the possibility that this was the first verse revealed about killing which was then abrogated (by āyat al-sayf), a possibility which he rejects, and second that the verse is a general declaration about killing the disbelievers. In neither case is the proposition supported by a sabab.<sup>5</sup>

The function of the sabab once again, seems minimal, serving a general exegetical function and providing a haggadic background to the verse.

## Notes to 2/190

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 25; al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 49-50 and Wajīz, p. 50; al-ʿIrāqī, ff. 3b-4a; Berlin 3578, f. 10b; also Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 29b.
2. Ibn Ishāq, Sīra II 370-372; al-Wāqidī, al-Maghāzī II 571-633.
3. See esp. al-Qurṭubī II 347-350; also al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 257; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 102.
4. Hibat Allāh, p. 19; al-Naḥḥās, pp. 27-28; al-Baghdādī, Beyazit 445, f. 11b.
5. Al-Ṭabarī III 561-563, reports 3089-3095.

2/194

The sacred month for the sacred month.  
 The law of retaliation (applies to) the holy things.  
 He who commits aggression against you,  
 commit aggression against him with the like  
 of what he did to you.

The most popular report for this verse fits it in with the pericope starting with verse 190 or perhaps 189 as well<sup>1</sup> by aligning the section with the treaty of Ḥudaybiya and its consequences. Al-Wāḥidī's report is the following:

The prophet and his companions approached Mecca in Dhū'l-Qa'da until (they reached) Ḥudaybiya and the polytheists stopped them. The next year, they entered Mecca and performed the umra in Dhū'l-Qa'da; they remained there three nights. The polytheists had bragged when they repelled (the prophet) on the day of Ḥudaybiya so God allowed him to retaliate against them. So the verse was revealed.<sup>2</sup>

Al-Suyūṭī's version of the report makes the matter explicit by adding at the end "the entering of Mecca occurred in the same month as (the prophet) was previously repelled." One holy month has been replaced by another holy month in retaliation.

Another sabab, which among the asbāb books is found only in Berlin 3578, places the emphasis on the phrase "the law of retaliation (applies to) the holy things" and removes the verse from the specification of Ḥudaybiya. According to al-Jaṣṣās' version of the report:

The disbelievers said to the prophet:  
 "Are you forbidden to kill us in the holy month?" He said: "Yes". They wished to change (his position) about the holy months, so they fought him. So God revealed...  
 [2/194]..., meaning, if they act unlawfully in some way towards you in the holy months, then act unlawfully towards them in a like way.<sup>3</sup>

Al-Jaṣṣāṣ prefers this second sabab and from it is able to deduce that any unlawful action--stealing or whatever--may be retaliated against, although whether permission must be gained from an authority before that is done raises some discussion.<sup>4</sup> One of the reasons for this concerns the nature of the first sabab which al-Jaṣṣāṣ cites also; the verse, if interpreted along the lines of the first sabab, would be an account of an incident in the prophet's life--his action in replacing one holy month with another and that is what is called a khābar. Now, according to al-Jaṣṣāṣ, a single statement cannot be both a khābar and an amr--it cannot be a narrative statement and a commandment from God at the same time. But yet, he reasons, we know that killing is permitted in the holy months (because that is the practice established by the Sunna), so the second sabab would seem to be more appropriate as a basic for halakhic deduction.<sup>5</sup>

Overall, the basic stress of the asbāb material is to establish, once again, the pre-Islamic background of the customs of the holy months in which retaliation could not take place in those months. While the asbāb materials lend themselves to halakhic deduction, haggadic motivation seems to be the underlying principle.

## Notes to 2/194

1. See above ad 2/189a.
2. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 50; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 25; Berlin 3578, ff. 10b-11a; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 30a and Khams mi'a āya, f. 86a for a similar context; Mujāhid, p. 98; al-Ṭabarī III 575-579 reports 3130-3141; Ibn Ishāq, Sīra II 370 (a comment actually from Ibn Hishām); al-Naḥḥās, pp. 29-30; al-Jaṣṣās I 261; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 111; al-Qurṭubī II 354.
3. Al-Jaṣṣās I 261; Berlin 3578, f. 11a; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 111; al-Qurṭubī II 354; al-Qurṭubī prefers the first sabab because it is more famous and widespread.
4. Al-Jaṣṣās I 261; also Ibn al-ʿArabī I 112, al-Qurṭubī II 356; al-Naḥḥās, pp. 29-30, on the point of required permission.
5. Al-Jaṣṣās I 261.

2/195        Spend in the way of God  
               and let not your hands lead to destruction.  
               Do good, for God loves those  
               who do good.

The asbāb reports for this verse display two facets especially prominently: a concern with literal and metaphorical interpretations and the way in which different reports convey the same sense but in varying detail.

One theme in these reports concentrates on the first line, "spend (infiqū) in the way of God" and takes the statement literally; the basic report states "This verse was revealed about spending (naḥaga)".<sup>1</sup> An elaboration of this arises in another report:

The Anṣār used to give charity and gifts  
 as God wished. A practice arose  
 among them (however) such that they held it  
 back. So God revealed...[2/195]... 2

The report makes clearer exactly what is meant by the simple gloss of the first sabab, that it is actually the giving of money or goods that is involved in this verse.

A second theme pays more attention to the second line of the verse "let not your hands lead to destruction" seeing this as "destruction" equalling "ceasing jihād" and showing a basic materialistic attitude towards "spend". A simple report found in Berlin 3578 sums it up well:

When the prophet ordered preparations made  
 (for the attack on) Mecca, the Anṣār said:  
 "What of the property we own (in Mecca)?"<sup>3</sup>

The fear of loss of property, the sabab implies, must not hinder one's striving in the way of God; one must be prepared to "spend in the way of God" rather than be destroyed (in this case by the Meccans) for failing to wage battle. A second report in this vein is found in extenso

in al-Wāḥidī and al-Ṭabarī, with a prologue relating to the battles of conquest in Egypt against al-Rūm; in the middle of this battle the memory of Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī is jostled by an incident and he remembers the true interpretation of 2/195 because he remembers its sabab:

[Abū Ayyūb said] :This verse was revealed about a group of us from the Anṣār who, when God strengthened Islam and its helpers grew to be many, some of us said to each other: "Our property is being neglected while God strengthens Islam. If we remain with our property, we could repair what has been neglected." So God revealed his rejection of what we said.<sup>4</sup>

This part of the sabab is all that al-Suyūṭī bothers to repeat. The report is quite evidently an elaboration of the first one of this theme, serving the same exegetical function that it serves.

A third theme emerges which treats the verse in a metaphorical way; the "spending" has reference more to oneself and the destruction, to sin:

A man committed a sin and said: "There is no excuse for me!" So God revealed ...[2/195]...which is a witness for him of innocence.<sup>5</sup>

The asbāb reports all function in order to provide a context for exegesis; the sabab is a literary form providing exegetical information. Such a form can convey a literal or metaphorical interpretation of a verse through providing a narrative context which conveys semantic or conceptual equivalents for the Quranic vocabulary.

## Notes to 2/195

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 50, second report; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 25, first report; al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Tafsīr VI 32-33; al-Ṭabarī III 583-586, reports 3144, 3145, 3148, 3150, 3159, 3161; al-Qurṭubī II 361.
2. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 50-51, first and third reports, varying detail; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 25, third report; Berlin 3578, f. 11a, second report; al-Ṭabarī III 584-587, reports 3146, 3147, 3149, 3151-3157, 3160, 3162-3165 in varying detail; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 30b and Khams mi'a āya, f. 15b, adds further details such that this was after the fulfilled pilgrimage; thus he displays continuing concern with the narrative context.
3. Berlin 3578, f. 11a, first report.
4. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 51-52, fifth report; al-Ṭabarī III 590-591, reports 3179-3180; Berlin 3578, f. 11a, third report; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 25; al-Qurṭubī II 361-362; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 115; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 262; al-Jaṣṣāṣ also cites other interpretations of the verse, saying that all such meanings could be included in the verse.
5. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 26, fourth report; al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 51, fourth report; al-Ṭabarī III 588-589, reports 3167-3178 in varying detail.



2/196a Complete the ḥajj and the ʿumra to God.

Concerning this short statement at the beginning of this verse, al-Suyūṭī cites the following sabab:

A man came to the prophet covered with saffron and wearing a jubba. He said: "What is your command, oh prophet, concerning my ʿumra?" So God revealed: "And complete the ḥajj and the ʿumra to God." [The Prophet] said: "Where is the questioner about the ʿumra?" He replied: "Here I am!" He then said to him: "Shed your clothes, purify yourself and make yourself smell (as best) as you are able. Then, as you do on your ḥajj, do on your ʿumra." <sub>1</sub>

This report is uncited in any other asbāb text and is missing from every exegetical source consulted (al-Suyūṭī cites the report from Ibn Abī Ḥātim). The Quranic statement does provoke a great deal of discussion in the texts over the exact implications of the term "complete" (Ibn al-ʿArabī enumerates seven possibilities and sees them all as incorporated in the meaning)<sup>2</sup> and over the status of the ʿumra.<sup>3</sup> It is in the latter discussion--whether or not the ʿumra is obligatory (as al-Shāfiʿī argued) or voluntary (as Mālik and Abū Ḥanīfa state)--that the sabab may have been thought to have some relevance, in that the implication of the prophet's statement is that the ḥajj and ʿumra are on equal footing. Yet it is uncited by all the ahkām texts.

The actual report itself is a typical haggadic narrative with colourful detail and attempts at narrative realism, potentially full of exegetical importance but seemingly ignored for unknown reasons.

## Notes to 2/196a

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 26.
2. See Ibn al-ʿArabī I 117-118; also al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 263-264; al-Qurṭubī II 365-366; al-Ṭabarī IV 7-14.
3. See al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 264; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 118-119; al-Qurṭubī II 368-369; also see al-Naḥḥās, pp. 34-40.

2/196b

[Complete the hajj and the umra to God.]

But if you are prevented, then an offering as you are able and do not shave your heads until the offering reaches its place of sacrifice.

He who is sick among you or has a sickness on his head, then a recompense is fasting or charity or sacrifice.

When you are safe, he who enjoys himself with the umra until the hajj, then an offering as you are able; for he who cannot find (it), then fasting three days on the hajj and seven when you return; this is ten (days) altogether. That is for him whose family is not present at the holy mosque.

So fear God and know that God is severe in punishment.

A large number of asbāb reports are circulated for this verse.

Perhaps the most basic one occurs in al-Bukhārī and from there went into the asbāb books:

Ka'b ibn 'Ujra was asked about: "then a recompense is fasting". He said: I was taken to the prophet, lice falling on my face. He said: "I did not think that the problem had reached to this (extent) with you! Can you find a sheep?" I said: "No". He said: "Then fast three days or feed six poor people giving each one one-half a measure of food, and shave your head!" (The verse) was revealed (about me) specifically but (applies) to you in general.<sup>1</sup>

This report is less than lucid in that it seems to omit a number of details, found elsewhere, which complete the scenario. One detail often added was the incident took place at Ḥudaybiya: the Muslims were thus intending to go on the pilgrimage (umra).<sup>2</sup> They had already entered ihram and had thus already shaved.<sup>3</sup> But the need arose to shave the head of Ka'b before completing the umra (which was in this case not completed

anyway); such an action was not permitted until this verse was revealed,<sup>4</sup> specifying the penalty which must be paid for doing so.

Although the quantity of asbāb reports is large, they all concern Ka'b ibn 'Ujra and his lice. From this basic theme comes a variety of halakhic deductions which are made on the basis of, or at least justified on the basis of the asbāb reports. In al-Qurṭubī, for example, this takes place quite explicitly: <sup>5</sup> وَمَا يَدُلُّ عَلَى مَا قُلْنَاهُ سَبَبُ نَزُولِ هَذِهِ الْآيَةِ. The basic halakhic question which arose out of interpretation of the verse was precisely when may one shave if one has a scalp disease--it is implied in the sabab that it may be done immediately. Of greater concern perhaps is the fact that the exact "recompense" is unspecified in the verse but finds delineation in the sabab.<sup>6</sup> This is a good example of halakhic deduction based on asbāb information.

It is worth noting, however, that the basic thrust of the sabab may actually be haggadic, in the sense that it tries to answer the reasonable question that arises in reading the verse of why is "a sickness on his head" specified? Is this not included within the general category "sickness"? The answer the sabab provides for the curious reader is that the verse reflects an actual incident to which the Qur'ān responded with a specific reply.

## Notes to 2/196b

1. Al-Bukhārī, al-Sahīḥ, Kitāb al-Tafsīr VI 33; for a multitude of other, simpler reports see: al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 52-55, six reports; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 26, three reports; Berlin 3578, f. 11a, three reports; Muslim, al-Sahīḥ, Kitāb al-Ḥajj, pp. 593-594 (trans.); Hibat Allāh, pp. 19-20 (how abrogation affects the verse is not specified); al-Kalbī, p. 21; Muqātil, Tafsīr, ff. 30b-31a; Mujāhid, p. 100; al-Ṭabarī IV 54-69; (on IV 58, al-Ṭabarī states: هذه الآية نزلت عليه بسبب كعب بن عجرة); al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 281-283; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 124; al-Qurṭubī II 383-384.
2. See e.g., al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 54, fifth report.
3. Note the explicit statement in e.g., al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 26, second report: wa naḥnu muḥrimūn.
4. Note the impulse to provide the pre-Islamic/early Islamic background.
5. Al-Qurṭubī II 383.
6. The actual recompense varies according to the exact sabab, so Muslims have a choice, for example between a cow, a goat, a sheep, or a camel, but the legal point is always justified by reference to the sabab. See e.g., al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 282.

2/197        The hajj is in the well-known months.  
 For he who performs the hajj in them,  
 there shall be no intercourse or corruption,  
 and no disputing in the hajj. What  
 you do of good, God will know of it.  
 Take provisions; indeed, the best provision is the  
 fear of God, so fear me, oh you  
 of intelligence.

The sabab found for this verse relates to the phrase: "Take provisions; indeed, the best provision is the fear of God", for which a simple account is provided, for example, by al-Suyūṭī:

The people of Yaman used to go on the pilgrimage but did not bring along provisions. They said: "We are trusting in God". So God revealed...[2/197]... 1

While the identification of the party involved varies--sometimes it is simply "some Arabs",<sup>2</sup> other times, "the people from a distant country",<sup>3</sup> the point is always the same, to establish the fact that someone did not do what the Qur'ān says should be done, thus necessitating the ruling. For halakhic purposes the sabab is not of much relevance, for it gives no information about the pressing concern of exactly what provisions should be taken. The basic function of the sabab is haggadic.

## Notes to 2/197

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 26 from al-Bukhārī; also see al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 55 and Wajiz, p. 52; Berlin 3578, f. 11b; al-Kalbī, p. 22; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 31b; al-Ṭabarī IV 156-161; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 309; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 135; al-Qurṭubī II 411.
2. E.g., al-Ṭabarī IV 157-158 report 3737.
3. E.g., al-Ṭabarī IV 158 reports 3742, 3743.

2/198

There is no sin upon you if you seek the bounty of your Lord.  
When you move on from ʿArafāt,  
remember God at the sacred places and  
remember him just as he has guided you,  
even though before him you were of  
the misguided.

There are three basic asbāb accounts for this verse, all very similar.

One found in abbreviated form in al-Suyūṭī is as follows:

Abū Amāma al-Taymī said: I asked Ibn ʿUmar: "We are (people) who rent (camels). Are we to do the ḥajj?" Ibn ʿUmar said: "A man came to the prophet and asked him as you have asked me. He did not reply until Gabriel brought down upon him this verse...[2/198]. The prophet called him and said: 'You are pilgrims!'"<sub>1</sub>

Two points are implicit in this sabab as they are in the others as well: one, that the first sentence relates to the pilgrimage and should not be read out of context; two, that the phrase "seek the bounty of your Lord" equals engaging in business.

The second sabab is similar:

ʿUkāz, Mijanna and Dhū'l-Majāz were markets in the Jāhiliyya. They restrained themselves from trading in the ḥajj season until they asked the prophet about that and there was revealed: "There is no sin upon you if you seek the bounty of your Lord", (that is) in the pilgrimage season.<sub>2</sub>

The gloss at the end of the sabab, "in the pilgrimage season", makes the point of the pilgrimage context explicit but is, as well, reported to be included in a variant reading of the verse by Ibn ʿAbbās and Ibn Masʿūd.<sup>3</sup>

The third sabab is short but significant:

They used to avoid selling and trading in the ḥajj, saying: "(these are) days for the remembering of God". So God revealed ...[2/198]...; so they traded.<sub>4</sub>



Both glosses are included in this sabab but, too, an attempt is made to connect the beginning of the Quranic verse to the remainder, through the notion of "remembering God"--one may trade and remember God together, the sabab implies.

These asbāb accounts and their glosses quite apparently can serve halakhic purposes; al-Qurṭubī states after establishing the gloss "seek the bounty of your Lord" equals "trading": "the indication that this is sound is what al-Bukhārī transmits (i.e., the second sabab above)".<sup>5</sup> As far as the pilgrimage context goes, al-Jaṣṣāṣ does not bother to refer to the sabab for such an obvious point; he feels that the context is clearly established by what precedes and what follows the phrase in question.<sup>6</sup> Thus, while the sabab certainly could establish the halakhically-relevant context, it seems to have been too obvious a point even to need the connection made. Haggadically, the motive here once again is to establish what the practice had been and assert that the Quranic ruling contradicts the former ideas.

## Notes to 2/198

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 27, second report; also see al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 55, first report and Wajīz, p. 52 in general terms; Berlin 3578, f. 11b, second report; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 309, first report; al-Qurṭubī II 414, second report; al-Ṭabarī IV 164-169, reports 3765, 3770, 3779, 3789 in varying detail.
2. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, pp. 26-27, first report; also see al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 56, second report; Berlin 3578, f. 11b, first report; al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Tafsīr VI 35; al-Ṭabarī IV 165, 169, reports 3769, 3791 respectively; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 31b, similar; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 309, second report; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 135-136; al-Qurṭubī II 413, first report.
3. See for example al-Ṭabarī IV 165-168, reports 3766, 3768, 3772, 3773, 3778, 3785, 3786.
4. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 56, third report; Berlin 3578, f. 11b, third report; al-Ṭabarī IV 164-168, reports 3762, 3763, 3771, 3775, 3776, 3781 and especially 3784; also see al-Kalbī, p. 22.
5. Al-Qurṭubī II 413.
6. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 310.

2/199

Then move on from where the people move on.  
Ask God's forgiveness, for God is forgiving and beneficent.

To understand this verse, the asbāb material once again stresses what the former practice was in order to contrast it with the Quranic prescription. The following report from al-Wāḥidī is typical of more extensive versions of the basic report:

(The narrator) said: I let a camel belonging to me stray on the day of ʿArafāt so I went out to search for it at ʿArafāt. I saw the prophet standing with the people at ʿArafāt and I said (to myself): "This (man) is from the Ḥums. He should not be here." ...Quraysh used to be called Ḥums. Satan came to them and tempted them, saying: "If you aggrandize what is outside your ḥaram, the people will look down on your ḥaram (itself)." So they did not go out from the ḥaram and remained at Muzdalifa. When Islam came, God revealed...[2/199]...]

On the eighth day of the pilgrimage, the pilgrims leave the town of Mecca itself and go via Mina and Muzdalifa to ʿArafāt which is/was actually outside the ḥaram proper. The Ḥums, however, according to this sabab, did not do this but remained at Muzdalifa. The Qurʾān however commands them "to move on from where the people move on", that is, on to ʿArafāt, and perform the waiting (wuqūf) there, and then perform the ifāḍa, the "moving out" or running.

This sketching of the background, which receives widespread acceptance, created, however, its own exegetical problems when the verse was put into the context of the entire passage which was viewed as a whole unit providing systematic presentation of the ritual in regard to the pilgrimage. In verse 198, the pilgrims have already been ordered to "move on from ʿArafāt" but then in this verse, the instruction would

seem to be for a stage before arriving at ʿArafāt, yet the verse begins with thumma, "then". All sorts of explanations arise--that thumma does not imply here tagrīb, "sequential ordering"; that this is a case of reversal of ta'khīr and tagdīm, the preceding and the following, and so forth.<sup>2</sup> Not unexpectedly perhaps, another sabab arises in order to avoid the problem; found in Berlin 3578 and other exegetical works, where the reference of "moving on" is to Muzdalifa (Jamʿ or al-Mashʿar al-ḥarām) and "the people" refers to Abraham specifically.<sup>3</sup> On the pilgrimage, a wait occurs at Muzdalifa on the return from ʿArafāt on the night between the ninth and tenth days, and the pilgrims move on after that. The reference to "the people" in the verse is taken simply as a reference to the Abrahamic establishment of the pilgrimage, not as a pre-Islamic background that the Qurʾān contradicts. The verse therefore fits in with the implied sequence of the whole passage, thus avoiding the problems of the other sabab but of course introducing its own: how can al-nās "the people" refer to one man, Abraham? Furthermore, the one authority for this report, al-Ḍaḥḥāk cannot overrule the much more widespread support of the other sabab.<sup>4</sup>

In a relatively minor way, the verse also acts through its sabab to establish the practice of the wuqūf or standing on ʿArafāt, for although the verse makes reference only to the ifāḍa or departure, most of the asbāb reports phrase the matter with reference to the standing or waiting that occurs at ʿArafāt.<sup>5</sup> The primary role of the sabab however is exegetical through establishing a context in the pilgrimage to which reference is being made and thus fitting the verse into the legislative framework of the entire passage.

## Notes to 2/199

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 56-57; other extensive reports like this one are found in Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 199 and al-Ṭabarī IV 188-189, report 3850; brief reports giving the same thrust are found in al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 56 and Wajīz, p. 53; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 27; Berlin 3578, f. 11b; al-Ṭabarī IV 184-188; al-Jassās I 310; al-Qurtubī II 428; al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Tafsīr VI 35; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 31b; al-Kalbī, p. 22.
2. See e.g., al-Ṭabarī IV 190-191; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 139.
3. Berlin 3578, f. 11b; al-Jassās I 310; briefly al-Ṭabarī IV 189, report 3842; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 139.
4. See e.g., al-Jassās I 310.
5. E.g., al-Jassās I 310, discusses the verse in "The chapter on the standing at ʿArafāt".

2/200

When you have finished your holy rites,  
remember God as you remember your fathers  
or with greater remembrance.  
Among the people he who says:  
"Our Lord, give to us in the world",  
he will not receive any portion in the  
hereafter.

Several reports occur concerning this verse, a majority of which are very simple, once again establishing that the contrary practice did occur before the revelation of the Qur'ān. One of al-Wāḥidī's reports is as follows:

The people of the Jāhiliyya, when they gathered during the festival season, remembered the deeds of their fathers in the Jāhiliyya, along with their days and their lineage, and they boasted (about it). So God revealed...[2/200]...<sub>1</sub>

Other reports which occur provide a little bit more information by specifying which "holy rite" is intended, a question which provides for some discussion in the ahkām texts; al-Ṭabarī includes the specific place 'Arafāt in one of his reports; Muqātil specifies the mosque at Minā.<sup>2</sup>

A report by al-Suyūṭī shows a slightly different frame of reference towards the verse:

A group of Arabs came to the place of waiting and said: "Allāhuma, make it a year with abundant rain, fertile, with friendship and excellence." But they did not remember any of the affairs of the hereafter. So God revealed "...He will not receive any portion in the hereafter". Then others from among the believers came after them (to the place of waiting?) and said: "'Our Lord, give us good in the world and good in the hereafter and protect us from the punishment of the fire.'" To these will be the portion of what they have earned. God is swift in the reckoning." [vs. 201-202].<sub>3</sub>

The emphasis here is on the identification of the "he who" in the verse, to the neglect of the first part of the verse. Another sabab,

however, found in al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī but not in any of the asbāb texts, manages to combine both:

When the Arabs finished their holy rites arriving at Minā, a man arose and petitioned God, saying: "Allāhuma, my father was great in generosity and has a great shrine and had much property! Give to me as you gave to my father!" He did not remember God but rather remembered his father, asking to be given to in the world.<sup>4</sup>

Through this report, the verse is integrated into a whole unit; technically, at least in al-Ṭabarī, this report is not a sabab, for it lacks the phrase nazalat fī or the like; it is thus not surprising that it is excluded from the asbāb books. Al-Qurṭubī, however, has no difficulty in adding to the report: "So the verse was revealed to keep them remembering God more than their necessity of remembering their fathers in the days of the Jāhiliya," implying, at the least, a connection between the report and the revelation of the verse.<sup>5</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, on the other hand, not tied to the concept of the sabab, deals with the question in terms simply of who is "being described" by these words of the verse; a "causal" connection is not made, although a "reference" is certainly there.<sup>6</sup>

## Notes to 2/200

1. Al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, p. 57; his other report and his rendition in Wajīz, p.53 are similar in thrust; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 27, first two reports; Berlin 3578, f. 11b, two reports; al-Ṭabarī IV 196-198, reports 3847-3858 in varying detail; al-Qurṭubī II 432.
2. Al-Ṭabarī IV 198, report 3857; Muqātil, Tafsīr, ff. 31b-32a and Khams mi'a āya, ff. 33b-34a; also see Ibn al- Arabī I 140; al-Qurṭubī II 431; al-jamra, the pebbles at Minā are also often specified, e.g., al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 27.
3. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 27, third report.
4. Al-Ṭabarī IV 199, report 3866; al-Qurṭubī II 431.
5. Al-Qurṭubī II 431.
6. Al-Ṭabarī IV 196.



2/204

Among the people is he whose speech  
about worldly life pleases you and he  
witnesses to God as to what is in  
his heart but he is a persistent disputer.

The notion of hypocrisy present in this verse is the theme which is elaborated in three asbāb al-nuzūl, two of which attach the verse to specific persons and incidents in the life of Muḥammad.

The only report found in al-Wāḥidī, and the one which is common in other sources, relates the verse to the person of al-Akhnas ibn Sharīq.<sup>1</sup>

[The verse] was revealed about al-Akhnas ibn Sharīq al-Thaqafī, an ally of Banū Zuhra. He came to the Prophet in Medina and proclaimed to him his allegiance to Islam. The Prophet was pleased to hear that from him; [Akhnas] said: "I came wanting to join Islam and God knows that I am sincere." That is God's saying: "He witnesses to God as to what is in his heart." Then he left the Prophet and passed by some crops and donkeys belonging to a group of believers. He then burnt the crops and injured the donkeys. So God revealed about him: "And when he turns away, he passes through the land spreading corruption in it, destroying crops and livestock" [2/205].<sup>2</sup>

The report given by al-Ṭabarī adds further verses revealed concerning the same person and his "persistent disputing"--Q. 104/1 and 68/10-13 although it is not clear that the same incident as that above is to be cited as the sabab for the revelation of these verses.<sup>3</sup> It is apparent that this sabab represents a full elaboration of the keywords of the Quranic phraseology and that the Quranic revelation adds little movement to the actual story line.

The Sīra of Ibn Ishāq, while knowing the figures of al-Akhnas and his constant conflict with the Prophet, gives no indication that al-Akhnas ever intended or even suggested that he would convert to Islam. This fact has obviously led exegetes such as Ibn ʿAtīya to give the following

comment after the above sabab: "It has not been established that al-Akhnas converted."<sup>4</sup> But the position in the Sīra is that the verse in question was revealed about another incident anyway--the Quranic verse finds an alternative peg to which the hypocrisy may be attached. The Sīra report is repeated by al-Qurṭubī, al-Suyūṭī (his first cited report) and al-Ṭabarī:

Ibn ʿAbbās said: When [the attack] befell the party containing Marthad and ʿĀsim [who were killed] at Rajī, some of the hypocrites said: "Woe for those madmen who died! They did not remain among their families nor did they deliver the message of their leader!" So God revealed about that talk of the hypocrites and what befell those of the group of good by that which befell them...[2/204]...<sup>5</sup>

The function of this sabab may well be to fix the verse temporally; the failure to identify the munāfiqūn and their position within the community, the lack of transfer of the Quranic notion of the hypocrite's speech being pleasing and of the "persistent disputer" motif make this sabab's role lie outside the function of Quranic elaboration, contrary to the role of the previous sabab. The importance of attaching the verse specifically to Rajī, furthermore, cannot be easily ascertained.

The third sabab for this verse is of quite a different character and is found in al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī and in basic plot in Berlin 3578 where the suggestion is that the verse was revealed about "all hypocrites". The basic text of the sabab but without the Quranic reference is found in two versions in the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Tirmidhī;<sup>6</sup> there is not, however, total agreement between the texts and, in fact, the two reports given in al-Tirmidhī appear to have been conflated into one in al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī. Al-Qurṭubī introduces his account thus:

Qatāda, Mujāhid and most of the ʿulamā state that the verse [i.e. 2/204] was revealed about every "closet" disbeliever, hypocrite, liar or harmful person who reveals from his tongue the opposite of that. So the verse is general [ʿāmma].<sup>7</sup>

Al-Ṭabarī likewise states that the verse "intends [uniya] all hypocrites...[who conceal] the difference between their inside thoughts and their outward manifestations." Two reports are given in support of this suggestion, both reports being similar to al-Tirmidhī's ḥadīths.<sup>8</sup> The following is the report as found in al-Qurṭubī, with the major variants (excluding changes in order of the elements) as found in al-Tirmidhī and al-Ṭabarī restricted to the footnotes:

[2/204] resembles what comes in al-Tirmidhī<sup>9</sup>  
 from some of the books of God.<sup>10</sup>  
 Among the worshippers of God is a group<sup>11</sup>  
 whose tongues are sweeter than honey  
 but their hearts are more bitter than the  
 Ṣabir tree.<sup>12</sup> They appear to the people in  
 clothes of the skin of lambs<sup>13</sup> and propagate  
 throughout the world the religion;<sup>14</sup> God said:  
 Are they mistaken about me? Are they becoming  
 bold with me? So I swear by myself I will ordain  
 for them<sup>15</sup> a trial leaving the mild of them helpless  
 (bewildered).<sup>16</sup>

In both the reports of al-Ṭabarī the statement that these words are "from the books of God" is questioned and the reply given that it is Q. 2/204.

A report such as this one which exhibits a fair measure of discrepancy between the sources and the intent of which is somewhat mystifying must remain for the most part a question mark. It may well be, however, that the report and its divine quotation (from an undetermined source) represent some common tradition of the ultimate expression of the motif of hypocrisy; certainly the standard phrases are there of apocalyptic imagery concerning the testing of such people:

- sweet as honey versus the most bitter of substances (cf., Revelation X, 10; also see Proverbs XVI)

- the wolf versus the sheep (cf. Isaiah IX, 7)
- the ultimate power of God to extract punishment from the hypocrites.

It remains only to state that the halakhic deductions from this verse all take the meaning in a general sense as suggested by this last sabab; al-Jaṣṣāṣ<sup>17</sup> does not even bother giving asbāb material for the verse. The legal importance of the verse was seen to go beyond that suggested by the first sabab--that is, whether one may believe the spoken confession of faith, although of course that was an extremely crucial point in the Muslim Community--but was thought to reach to the level of the question to what extent anyone may be trusted in the oral statements that he makes.<sup>18</sup>

## Notes to 2/204

1. Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 32a, gives a full genealogy for both al-Akhnas and his mother.
2. Al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, p. 58 and Wajīz, p. 53 in abbreviated form; al-ʿIrāqī, f. 5a; Berlin 3578, f. 11b; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 28, quoted from al-Ṭabarī; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 143; Muqātil, Tafsīr, ff. 32a-32b; al-Ṭabarī IV 229-230, report 3961.
3. No mention is made of this sabab for those verses in al-Wāhidī, Asbāb; in fact, Q. 104 has no sabab at all in that book. Shākir notes that al-Ṭabarī does not mention the sabab at the appropriate later points in his Tafsīr either (al-Ṭabarī IV 230, note 1) but he takes this as evidence that the present Tafsīr of al-Ṭabarī is greatly abbreviated.
4. Apud al-Qurtubī III 15.
5. Ibn Ishāq, Sīra II 174; al-Ṭabarī IV 230-231, reports 3962 and 3963; al-Qurtubī III 15; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, pp. 27-28, taken from Ibn Abī Ḥātim.
6. Al-Tirmidhī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ IX 246-247; two reports hereafter referred to as al-Tirmidhī A = from Abū Hurayra, al-Tirmidhī B = from Ibn ʿUmar.
7. Al-Qurtubī III 15; Berlin 3578, f. 11b.
8. Al-Ṭabarī IV 231-232; two reports hereafter referred to as al-Ṭabarī 3964 and al-Ṭabarī 3965.
9. Al-Qurtubī only.
10. Al-Tirmidhī A: "Muḥammad said" instead; al-Tirmidhī B: "God said" instead.
11. Al-Tirmidhī A: adds "who will be separated at the end of time"; al-Tirmidhī B: "I created a creation" instead; al-Ṭabarī 3964: "To God are worshippers" instead; al-Ṭabarī 2965: "a group" instead.
12. Al-Tirmidhī A: "Their hearts are the hearts of wolves" instead; re: ṣabir [ṣabr al-Tirmidhī B sic] see Lane, sv, where note that Freytag also gives possible meaning of "myrrh", thus the statement being a pun in Hebrew [ מר bitter, מרר myrrh].
13. Al-Qurtubī ؟؟ الضأن من اللين ؛  
al-Tirmidhī A من الدين perhaps an error; al-Ṭabarī 3964 adds: "Their hearts are the hearts of wolves"; al-Tirmidhī B omits.

14. Al-Qurṭubī: يشترون الدنيا الدين ;  
 al-Tirmidhī A: They deceived يختلون ;  
 al-Ṭabarī 3964: يحترون ;  
 al-Ṭabarī 3965: يجنالون ;  
 al-Tirmidhī B omits.
  
15. Al-Tirmidhī A: "I will send to those among them" instead; al-Ṭabarī 3964: "I will send to them" instead.
  
16. Ḥayrān.
  
17. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 317.
  
18. E.g., al-Qurṭubī III 15-16; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 143; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 317.

2/207      Among the people is he who  
               sells himself, seeking the pleasure  
               of God; God has compassion on  
               the worshippers.

A variety of diverse asbāb al-nuzūl are found for this verse; all attempt to find some sort of historical peg in order to identify the unknown "he who". The most prominent sabab among them, but one which also varies to a great extent in various details, relates the verse to the person of Abū Yahyā Ṣuhayb ibn Sinān; the account is given in the most straightforward way by al-Suyūṭī:

Ṣuhayb came to the prophet as an emigrant (but) a group of Quraysh followed him. So, when he got off his camel, he pulled out the contents of his quiver and said: "Oh group of Quraysh! You know that I will shoot each of you! By God, you will not reach me until I have shot every arrow I have in my quiver! Then I will strike anything that remains within my reach with my sword! Then you may do as you wish. Otherwise, if you wish, I shall point out to you my property in Mecca and (then) you must leave me to my way." They said: "All right". So when he reached the prophet in Medina, he said: "The sale benefits Abū Yahyā! Benefits Abū Yahyā!" So...[2/207] was revealed.<sup>1</sup>

The variations on this story as found in other sources indicate perhaps a joining together of basic elements of different anecdotes; to some extent the process can be re-created by examining earlier accounts. Sufyān al-Thawrī<sup>2</sup> gives only the basic theme of Ṣuhayb having to give up everything to the polytheists in order to emigrate. Al-Kalbī<sup>3</sup> gives only the identification of Ṣuhayb and his parting with his belongings. Both Muqātil and al-Ṭabarī identify other people in addition to Ṣuhayb who encountered the same problem and apparently about whom the verse was revealed.<sup>4</sup> Muqātil, however, goes on to give the full story of Ṣuhayb similar in detail to al-Suyūṭī's version but with the argument of Ṣuhayb based more on reason than brute strength.<sup>5</sup> Al-Ṭabarī,<sup>6</sup> additionally,

gives a second report which has a number of connected elements with al-Suyūṭī's version but gives the identification simply as "a man". Significant too are the discrepancies in exactly who said: "The sale benefits Abū Yahyā!"; al-Ṭabarī's second report<sup>7</sup> puts the words in the mouth of ʿUmar; al-Wāḥidī and al-Qurṭubī give it as Muḥammad<sup>8</sup> or alternatively Abū Bakr.<sup>9</sup> In a different vein, al-Wāḥidī and al-Qurṭubī<sup>10</sup> report that it is the initiative of the Quraysh to suggest that Ṣuhayb identify his belongings in Mecca so that they may take them, especially since, according to the Quraysh, Ṣuhayb was leaving Mecca a wealthy man but had come years previously as a beggar. Al-Wāḥidī and al-Qurṭubī again<sup>11</sup> are able to adduce even another variant such that the roles of Ṣuhayb and Quraysh are even further intertwined: Quraysh tortured Ṣuhayb who then pleaded old age and offered up his belongings in order to be left alone.<sup>12</sup>

All these stories demonstrate nothing if not flexibility and a degree of uncertainty. To account for such diversity around a basic theme it seems likely that a certain motivating pressure required elaboration of the identification be found for the unknown person referred to in the verse, probably occurring at a time after the period when stories such as these were codified into more stable forms (e.g., in *Sīra*). One of the pressures producing this result may well have been another sabab for the verse, one which probably had its origins in intra-Islamic sectarian dispute. Prominent within the Shīʿī work of al-Ḥaskānī and even acknowledged in germ form as a last option by both Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Qurṭubī,<sup>13</sup> are a series of ten reports linking (by varying degrees) the revelation of this verse to the figure of ʿAlī ibn abī Ṭālib. Four major variant reports are given<sup>14</sup> all of which explain the story of Muḥammad's hijra, ʿAlī's role in getting Abū



Bakr to accompany Muḥammad and ʿAlī's sleeping on Muḥammad's bed in order to trick the Quraysh who were already suspicious that Muḥammad would try to leave town.<sup>15</sup> After the completion of the intrigue, the verse was revealed about ʿAlī's role in it. This story finds its Quranic peg in various places, e.g., at Q. 9/40--"when the two of them were in the cave", an assumed reference to Muḥammad and Abū Bakr, also Q. 8/30 and 52/30.<sup>16</sup> On this occasion, however, there is also an implication in one of the reports at least that the account of the events and the revelation of the verse are but tools to proclaim ʿAlī's claim to supremacy--one report begins by proclaiming one of the "firsts"<sup>17</sup> about which later debaters of the right to the Caliphal position were so emphatic: ʿAlī was the first to convert to Islam after Khadija.<sup>18</sup> Two further reports from al-Ḥaskānī are similar in impulse if not in content: they proclaim that ʿAlī was the first "to sell himself seeking the pleasure of God," and are not, directly at least, connected with the hijra.<sup>19</sup>

These latter two reports are perhaps to be considered similar to another multitude of reports found in al-Kalbī, al-Ṭabarī, al-Wāḥidī, Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Qurṭubī,<sup>20</sup> which describe other people of whom it was said: "He has sold himself, seeking the pleasure of God". One example is the report of al-Kalbī who however actually adduces it as the sabab of the second part of the verse (i.e., "God has compassion on the worshippers"):

It was revealed about the parents of ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir and Sumayya and others whom the polytheists of Mecca killed.<sup>21</sup>

Unifying all these various reports, some of which give specific names, others of which simply cite "the Muslim", is the concept of martyrdom

in the path of Islam; often this martyrdom is connected with the proclamation of the shahāda or of the Quranic injunction of ordering good and forbidding evil.<sup>22</sup> The theme of the sabab thus becomes one of martyrdom and jihād.

Such an understanding then easily opens up the way to viewing the verse in a "general" way, that is, in reference to any striving in the path of God; both al-Qurṭubī and Ibn al-ʿArabī<sup>23</sup> opt for this, although neither make it an occasion for extensive halakhic discussion, preferring instead to treat the legal implications at a later point.

Al-Ṭabarī, too, opts for a general meaning such that the verse refers to all those "who order good and forbid evil"; however, he states, this does not exclude the reports about Ṣuhayb for:

they are not objectionable because the possibility of the revelation of a verse from God to his prophet with a sabab min al-asbāb, the meaning of the verse being everything that the "plain" [ẓāhir] sense comprehends, is not to be rejected.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, the sabab does not (necessarily) define the meaning or intent of a given verse, but serves only to connect the verse to a given historical situation. This fact, al-Ṭabarī would seem to be arguing, must not be allowed to restrict the intent of the Qur'ān; he accepts the witness of the sabab to the revelation of God in history but not that the occasion serves to limit God's intent in his revelation.

One further point is left to be made in reference to al-Ṭabarī's use of technical terminology in his discussions of this verse. Before introducing any of the asbāb al-nuzūl for the verse, he introduces the section by the following:

thumma ikhtalafa ahl al-ta'wīl  
fīman nazalat hādhihi al-āya fīhi  
wa man uniya bihā

The exegetes differ regarding whom this verse was revealed and who was meant by it.<sup>25</sup>

The opposition between nazalat fī and ʿanā bihā seems intended: the next statement is: "Some say: nazalat fī the emigrants and the helpers and ʿanā bihā those striving (mujāhidūn) in the path of God". This may seem to imply that nazalat fī was the general identification and ʿanā bihā the reference to specifics. However, al-Ṭabarī would seem not to be consistent in this, for the accounts of Ṣuhayb are introduced by nazalat fī and references to individuals who were martyred by ʿanā bi-dhālika. The difference may well be stylistic only but at the same time it indicates that technical terminology as far as "cause of revelation" goes was, at al-Ṭabarī's time, undeveloped.

## Notes to 2/207

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 28; also see al-ʿIrāqī, ff. 4a-4b; Berlin 3578, f. 12a.
2. Sufyān al-Thawrī, p. 26.
3. Al-Kalbī, p. 23; cf. below at n. 21 for another sabab for this verse from al-Kalbī; also see al-Wāḥidī, Wajīz, p. 54.
4. Muqāṭil, Tafsīr, f. 32b, ʿUmmār, Bilāl, Khabbāb and Ṣuhayb; al-Ṭabarī IV 248, report 4001, Abū Dharr and Ṣuhayb; Berlin 3578, f. 12a, Abū Dharr and Ṣuhayb.
5. Muqāṭil, Tafsīr, ff. 32b-33a; note the full identification of Ṣuhayb, listing ten names of the man to whom he was mawlā, after the anecdote.
6. Al-Ṭabarī IV 248, report 4002.
7. Al-Ṭabarī IV 248.
8. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 58; al-Qurṭubī III 20.
9. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 58-59; al-Qurṭubī III 20; also al-ʿIrāqī, f. 4b.
10. See Note 8.
11. It is apparent here that al-Qurṭubī is quoting or modifying only slightly the treatment of the verse by al-Wāḥidī; the latter is given no credit, however. (A common source for both people is not impossible of course.)
12. See Note 9.
13. Al-Ḥaskānī, Shawāhid al-Tanzīl I 96-102; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 144-145, last opinion of four; al-Qurṭubī III 21, last opinion; cross reference to Sūra 9 (see below at Note 16).
14. Al-Ḥaskānī I 96-97(no. 133), 99-100 (no. 137), 100-101 (no. 139) and 102 (no. 142).
15. The basic account is common to early historical works; see e.g., Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 482-486; also see M. J. Kister, "On the papyrus of Wahb ibn Munabbih", BSOAS 34(1974) esp. 564-571.
16. See e.g., Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 484 (ad 8/30; 52/30) al-Qurṭubī VIII 144-145 (ad 9/40).
17. See SM 36.

18. Al-Ḥaskāni I 97-99 (no. 134).
19. Al-Ḥaskāni I 101-102 (no. 140, 141).
20. Al-Kalbī, p. 23; al-Ṭabarī IV 249-250, reports 4003-4007;  
al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 59; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 144; al-Qurṭubī III 20-21;  
also Berlin 3578, f. 12, "fi'l-mujāhidīn".
21. Al-Kalbī, p. 23.
22. E.g., al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 59.
23. Al-Qurṭubī III 21; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 144-145.
24. Al-Ṭabarī IV 250.
25. Al-Ṭabarī IV 247.

2/208

Oh you who believe!  
 Enter into submission totally [kāffat<sup>an</sup>]  
 and do not follow the footsteps of Satan.  
 Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy.

Among the comments of al-Qurṭubī on this verse are two asbāb al-nuzūl. The first gives the understanding that the verse is a general appeal to all Jews and Christians to convert to Islam, giving the word kāffa the sense of "altogether". The sabab itself simply states that the verse was revealed about the ahl-al-kitāb and is attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās.<sup>1</sup>

The second sabab finds a variety of expression and is cited by a number of exegetes. Al-Ṭabarī and al-Suyūṭī, for example, understand the first part of this verse to mean "Enter into activity in the fullness of the idea of submission (salm) and do not neglect anything from it, Oh people of faith in Muḥammad and what he brings." In support of this, but definitely as an afterthought, the following anecdote is adduced by al-Ṭabarī (and then quoted by al-Suyūṭī) as being similar (naḥw) in meaning to his understanding:

It was revealed about Thaʿlaba, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām, Ibn Yamīn, Asad and Usayd the two sons of Kaʿb, Saʿyah ibn ʿAmr and Qays ibn Azyd - all of them Jews - who said: "Oh Muḥammad, the sabbath is a day which we had glorified, leave us to rest on it! The Torah is the book of God, leave us to busy ourselves with it during the night!" So...[2/208]...was revealed.<sup>2</sup>

Al-Wāḥidī reports a similar sabab but makes the point a bit more explicit: these Jews had converted to Islam and still clung to the sharīʿa of Moses, along with that of Muḥammad, holding to the sabbath and the Torah as well as avoiding camel meat and milk. For this they were repudiated.<sup>3</sup>

Although the sabāb is given as a reference to a specific historical event, it is apparent that, from a literary point of view, the anecdote is

arguing the continuing polemical issue of the abrogation of the Mosaic law; as such, the sabab is a constant within exegetical literature and has in this case simply been attached to a certain name and historical situation. As in other verses it is the polemical motif of the Jewish claim to the continued relevance of their religion in spite of, or even in addition to, Islam that is being dealt with.<sup>4</sup> The Muslim argument is that Islam has totally replaced Judaism, that there can be no compromise.

That this is the actual intent of the anecdote is a fact not totally ignored even within the Muslim exegetical tradition. Muqātil states:

"Oh you who believe: Enter into submission totally." That was 'Abd al-Salām, Salāb ibn Qays, Usayd and Asad the two sons of Ka'b, and Yāmīn ibn Yāmīn, who were believers from the people of the Torah asked permission of the Prophet to read the Torah during the prayer according to the rule of the Sabbath [fī amr al-sabt] and that they do some of what was in the Torah. So God said [sic]: "Follow the sunna of Muḥammad and his laws [sharā'i]. For [fa-inna] the Qur'ān of Muḥammad has abrogated [nasakha] every book before it". So he said: "Enter into Islam totally" that is into all the laws of islām.<sup>5</sup>

The notion that naskh refers to the supersession of previous religions rather than being only a method of legal hermeneutics is by no means suppressed in exegetical literature, as indeed Wansbrough has pointed out.<sup>6</sup> The point of interest in this sabab is then the possibility of compromise with Muḥammad suggested by the Jewish position in the sabab: the Jews will convert if they can retain their own distinctive practices. This prompts one to think of two possibilities in the representation of this polemic: (a) that the Jewish position is that differing circumstances may require a change of law but never the modification, let alone the total abrogation of

the unchangeable (non-contingent) laws of Judaism; to admit that would be to admit the supersession of Judaism as a valid dispensation.<sup>7</sup>

(b) that the Jewish position is that one may accept the mission of Muhammad, as a Jew, "on a basis of relativism as a rule of the divine, wise pedagogy in the education of the human race".<sup>8</sup> Thus the Jews (or Christians) could testify to being Muslims but still hold to their own religion.

Either of these suggestions would seem to be a possible interpretation of the sabab and both represent continuing polemical motifs common to the Judeo-Christian-Islamic world.



## Notes to 2/208

1. Al-Qurṭubī III 23.
2. Al-Ṭabarī IV 255-256; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 28, from al-Ṭabarī. Note in al-Ṭabarī the phrase after the sabab giving the understanding that the verse is a call to the believers to abandon jami' al-ma'ānī allatī laysat min hukm al-islām; the use of ma'ānī in a halakhic sense is worthy of attention.
3. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 59; Wajīz, p. 54; al-ʿIrāqī, f. 4b; Berlin 3578, f. 12a; also al-Qurṭubī III 24 from Muqātil, that the Jews wish to read the Torah during prayer. See below at note 5 re: Muqātil; al-Qurṭubī does not quote the entire Muqātil account.
4. See above ad 2/115, sabab 4.
5. Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 33a; see also al-Kalbī, p. 23, understanding the verse in a similar way: "entering into submission totally" refers to "the laws of the religion of Muḥammad" and "following the footsteps of Satan" refers to "the forbidding of the sabbath and of camel's meat and so forth".
6. QS 201.
7. See QS 199-202, SM 108-114.
8. M. Perlmann, "The Medieval Polemics between Islam and Judaism", in Goitein, Religion in a Religious Age, p. 133 (note 17a) re: Nathanael ibn Fayyūmī's Bustān al-ʿuqūl.

2/214 Or do you think that you will enter  
paradise without there coming to you the life  
of which those that passed away before  
you (experienced). Affliction and  
adversity touched them and they were  
shaken until the messenger and those who  
believed along with him said:  
When will God's help come?  
Is it not that the help of God is near?

Three asbāb al-nuzūl are found for this verse: only al-Qurṭubī  
adduces all three, two of them being found in, and possibly have been quoted  
from al-Wāḥidī. Popular is the first report which al-Qurṭubī and al-Wāḥidī  
give:

This verse was revealed about the battle  
of the Ditch when there befell the Muslims  
what befell them of striving and reinforcement  
(on the part of the enemy), heat, cold, calamities  
of life and all kinds of misfortunes and it was  
just as God said: "The hearts reached the  
throats" [33/10].<sup>1</sup>

Al-Suyūṭī and al-Ṭabarī give similar reports, making the revelation  
parallel to Q. 33/10 also,<sup>2</sup> but another of their reports, however, makes  
the verse a response to the hypocrites' saying recorded in Q. 33/12 "God  
and his prophet have promised us only delusions".<sup>3</sup> The key Quranic phrase  
linking the event to the Quranic passages (both 2/214 and 33/9-12) is the  
notion of "affliction and adversity" although neither term is duplicated in  
the sabab. This is perhaps due to the "strangeness" of the Quranic  
vocabulary<sup>4</sup> and thus we find conceptual equivalents included in the sabab--  
the sabab's main function, indeed, is probably lexical explanation.

The second sabab for this verse, related by al-Qurṭubī and in  
Berlin 3578, makes the verse connected to another major battle: the verse  
was revealed about Uhud.<sup>5</sup>

Although al-Qurṭubī gives us no source for this sabab, it is in fact found in Muqātil:

God revealed on the day of Uhud...[2/214].  
It was revealed about 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān and  
his companions.<sup>6</sup>

The lack of detail given for this incident, in sharp contrast to Muqātil's normal style, may suggest that the event is well known; it does not, however, appear to figure in Ibn Ishāq or al-Wāqidī.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, al-Qurṭubī suggests that intra-Quranic parallelism is the reason for the identification of the verse in connection with Uhud: he cites Q. 3/143 where the opening phrasing is identical with 2/214 which is usually connected with Uhud as is all of the latter part of sūra 3:<sup>8</sup>

Or do you think that you will enter paradise  
without God knowing those of you who strove.

It may well be that intra-Quranic contamination of asbāb al-nuzūl material has taken place here, especially given the analogous phraseology and its problematic use of lammā in the meaning of lam.<sup>9</sup>

The third sabab according to al-Qurṭubī, Berlin 3578 and al-Wāhidī is, in fact, reminiscent of the sabab noted for 2/207 above concerning Suhayb:

The verse was revealed as a consolation to the emigrants when they left their money and property in the hands of the polytheists, having chosen the beneficence of God. Then the Jews revealed (their) enmity toward the prophet and (that) made a group of rich hypocrites happy. So God sent down something pleasant [i.e., this verse] to their [the emigrants] hearts.<sup>10</sup>

While the connection with 2/207 may bear play here, it is hard to conceive that the notion of a continuous context between the two verses was being seriously suggested. More important is the notion common to

all three of the asbāb and that is, of course, the concern to connect the verse with the history of Muḥammad; by doing so, the eschatological implications of the verse are overridden and the contiguous notion of the umam khāliya<sup>11</sup> is obscured. This tendency is true for every exegete examined except for a short statement given by al-Qurṭubī. There, in an explanation of the notion of "the like of which those that passed away before you", he adduces the following comment, accompanied by no remarks of his own:

Wahb said: There are found between Mecca and al-Ṭā'if seventy dead prophets; the cause of their death was starvation and lice-infestation [qummal]! 12

This report, of course, acknowledges a radically different interpretation of the verse, totally unconnected with the profane history of Muḥammad but more involved with the cosmic working-out of general salvation history. The figure of "seventy" prophets can hardly be accidental either. It is not surprising that the editor of al-Qurṭubī finds it necessary to add "May God forgive Wahb".<sup>13</sup>

It would be foolish to exaggerate the importance of this (very isolated) report but it is significant to note the effect asbāb al-nuzūl do have in limiting the interpretation of any given verse.

## Notes to 2/214

1. Al-Qurtubī III 33; al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, p. 60; also Berlin 3578, f. 12a; see Ibn Ishāq, Sīra II 222 for the historical context of the "affliction and adversity".
2. Al-Tabarī IV 288, report 4065; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 28.
3. Al-Tabarī IV 288, report 4065 (cf. Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 522); al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 28.
4. See e.g., Ibn ʿAbbās, Masā'il Nāfi' ibn al-Azraq, pp. 338-339 al-ba'sā' defined as Khisb ("abundance") which as ʿA'isha ʿAbd al-Rahmān points out makes no sense as a definition; al-ḡarrā' defined as jadb, drought, desolation.
5. Al-Qurtubī III 33; Berlin 3578, f. 12a.
6. Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 34a; also see Kalbī, p. 23, for the same identification but not in the form of a sabab.
7. See indexes to both: ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān.
8. See e.g., Ibn Ishāq, Sīra II 106-121.
9. E.g., see al-Farrā' I 132 who adduces Q. 3/143 as a grammatical analogy for 2/214.
10. Al-Qurtubī III 33-34; al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, p. 60 and Wajīz, p. 56; Berlin 3578, f. 12a. Note that al-Qurtubī gives no halakhic deductions for the verse.
11. See QS 3; SM 23-24, 49 on historization of eschatological imagery.
12. Al-Qurtubī III 34.
13. Al-Qurtubī III 34, note 2.

2/215      They are asking you: "What should they give?" Say: Whatever you give of good, that is for parents, relatives, orphans, the poor and the followers of the way; whatever you do of good, God knows of it.

This verse introduces the most prominent series of the Quranic motif "They are asking you...". Foreshadowed in 2/189 (see above) and occurring six times between 2/215 and 2/222, all refer to problems of a legal nature<sup>1</sup> and thus may well be expected to be prime focal points for asbāb al-nuzūl material, due to the ambiguous "they" and the likely need to define closely the halakhic point being questioned.

However, the comparative simplicity of a prevelant sabab for this verse would seem to contradict this notion. The first of al-Wāḥidī's two possible asbāb is the following:

It was revealed about ʿAmr ibn al-Jamūḥ al-Anṣārī who was an old man and had a lot of money. He said: What shall he [sic] give as alms [bi mādhā yataṣaddaḡ] and to whom shall he give (it) [ʿalā man yunfiḡ].  
So this verse was revealed.<sup>2</sup>

The sabab, by employing the keywords of the Quranic phraseology--mādhā yunfiḡūna--but dividing them into the two parts, serves to make explicit what could be considered as rather elliptical Quranic wording, where the question seems to be what to give but the reply more relevant to the question of to whom to give it. But the point of the verse is rather too obvious to require such elaboration. Chronological considerations do not seem to be at play either--the person of ʿAmr ibn al-Jamūḥ is well enough known in Sīra and Maghāzī literature,<sup>3</sup> and the incident can, by implication, be dated to Medina prior to Uhud (where ʿAmr was killed), but historical precision is hardly the point of this sabab in itself. The description of

ʿAmr as old and rich may well be thought to have halakhic relevance; indeed the legal derivations from the verse conclude that this alms-giving is non-compulsory and to be considered over and above the statutory zakāt; thus it is probably to be considered only by the rich. However al-Jaṣṣāṣ and Ibn al-ʿArabī do not adduce any sabab for this verse at all yet make the halakhic deduction; they use only sunna to elaborate their arguments.<sup>4</sup> Al-Qurṭubī does adduce the sabab but does not employ it in his legal discussions. It would seem then that, despite the halakhically-charged context of the verse, haggadic "identification" is the prime role played by this sabab.

Al-Wāḥidī's second report is more amusing but it, too, is destined to halakhic irrelevancy:

The verse was revealed about a man who came to the Prophet and said: "I have one dinar." So the Prophet said: "Give it to yourself." He said: "I have two dinars." He said: "Give them to your family." He said: "I have three." He said: "Give them to your servant." He said: "I have four." He said: "Give them to your parents." He said: "I have five." He said: "Give them to your relatives." He said: "I have six." He said: "Give them in the path of God and it is the best of them."

A similar report is found in al-Jaṣṣāṣ but in the form of a prophetic ḥadīth not a sabab;<sup>6</sup> the appeal is to prophetic authority other than scriptural--furthermore, there the distribution suggested is one dinar to each recipient. Here it may be thought is the halakhic point, i.e., in what order and in what quantity should one distribute the gift? However, the discussions by the halakhists do not elaborate the point.<sup>7</sup> From a haggadic point of view the protagonist is not even identified and one can only surmise that the "traditional Oriental story-telling" form is the most important feature of the report.

The lack of exact identification of the questioners is also a feature of the virtually gratuitous identification - sabab found in al-Suyūṭī, al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī;<sup>8</sup> there, the identification is merely limited to the statement that it was the believers who were asking the question. However, after this identification comes a comment by al-Ṭabarī which is omitted by al-Suyūṭī. The statement is: "that gift is voluntary and is totally something other than zakāt".<sup>9</sup> This is, in fact, an argument against another report given by al-Ṭabarī from al-Suddī, a report which, through the evidence of its exclusion, is totally discredited by al-Wāḥidī's time and even more so by al-Suyūṭī's. Al-Suddī claimed that "the day this verse was revealed there was no zakāt; rather it was a gift which a man gave to his family and he gave ṣadaqa also. Then the zakāt abrogated it."<sup>10</sup> No attempt, it is to be noted, is made to justify this chronology; al-Ṭabarī thus finds it easy to say that the report of al-Suddī is possible but that "there is no indication in the verse of the soundness of what (al-Suddī) said."<sup>11</sup> Al-Qurṭubī, too, makes short work of the suggestion of abrogation by the statement that "zakāt is something other than gift-giving", an assertion all the more self-evident to al-Qurṭubī since there is no actual obligation in the verse and, as pointed out above, it applies only if one has a certain level of wealth.<sup>12</sup>



## Notes to 2/215

1. Cf., other passages, e.g., Q.17/85-87 "They are asking you about the spirit"; 79/42 "They are asking you about the hour."
2. Al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, p. 60 and Wajīz, p. 57; Berlin 3578, f. 12b; al-ʿIrāqī, f. 4b, ʿAmr asks about gifts for jihād and obedience; also al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 29, second report, ʿAmr asks "What shall we give from our possession and where shall we put it?" Al-Qurtubī III 35 with ʿAmr's words in the first person. Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 24a, "How much shall we give and to whom shall we give it?"
3. See: Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 452-453, II 90-91; al-Wāqidī, al-Maghāzī I 264-268. Also Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 34a where full tribal ancestry of ʿAmr is given and facts of his death at Uhud.
4. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 319-321; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 145-146.
5. Al-Qurtubī III 37.
6. Al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, p. 60; Berlin 3578, f. 12b; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 320.
7. E.g., al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 319-321; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 145-146; al-Qurtubī III 36-37.
8. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, pp. 29-30; al-Ṭabarī IV 294, report 4069; al-Qurtubī III 37.
9. Al-Ṭabarī IV 294, report 4069.
10. Al-Ṭabarī IV 293-294, report 4068.
11. Al-Ṭabarī IV 294.
12. Al-Qurtubī III 37; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 145 notes the possibility of abrogation (with no mention of the sabab) only to reject it; cf., however, Hibat Allāh, p. 20, who gives no argument against the verse's abrogation. The notion of abrogation is also implicit in Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 34a (also his Khams mi'a āya, f. 18b). Muqātil's treatment of this verse is combined with commentary on verse 219b.

2/217

They are asking you about the sacred month,  
fighting in it.

Say: Fighting in it is a great sin  
but barring from the path of God  
and disbelief in him  
and the sacred mosque  
and ejecting its people from it  
is more serious to God.  
Persecution is worse than killing.  
They will not cease fighting you until  
they turn you from your religion, if  
they can. He who from among you  
is turned from his religion  
and dies, they have their works nullified  
in this world and the hereafter.  
They are the companions of the fire,  
those who remain in it forever.

Al-Ṭabarī is able to preface his numerous reports concerning the revelation of this verse by the following statement: "There is no disagreement among all the ahl al-ta'wīl that this verse was revealed to the Prophet on the occasion of [fī sabab] the killing of Ibn al-Ḥaḍramī and his killer."<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, al-Ṭabarī gives fifteen reports to substantiate this assertion;<sup>2</sup> all relate the verse to the killing of Ibn al-Ḥaḍramī. Al-Wāḥidī likewise gives three reports, all very similar, all related to Ibn al-Ḥaḍramī.<sup>3</sup> Al-Suyūṭī is so sure of this sabab that he sums the story up in seven lines, as compared to four pages in al-Wāḥidī:

The Prophet sent out a group of men, led  
by 'Abd Allāh ibn Jaḥsh. They met Ibn al-  
Ḥaḍramī and killed him, not knowing whether  
that day was in Rajab or Jumādā. So the  
polytheists said to the Muslims: "You killed  
in the holy month", so God revealed...[2/217]...;  
some of them said: "This (action) has not become  
a sin, yet there is no reward for them!" So  
God revealed: "Those who believe and those who  
would emigrate and fight in the path of God,  
they have the hope of the mercy of God. God  
is forgiving, compassionate." [2/218].<sup>4</sup>

The major report cited by al-Ṭabarī, al-Wāḥidī, al-Qurṭubī and a multitude of others comes from the Sīra of Ibn Ishāq; there seem little point in repeating the very extended account of the incident which is, of course, already translated.<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting however that the report of al-Suyūṭī so assumes the acquaintance of his audience with the story that he leaves out all the subtleties and problems of the anecdotes. Al-Suyūṭī states "the polytheists said to the Muslims", implying that the "they are asking you" of the Quranic verse is a response to the polytheists. While this was a common assumption with other exegetes too,<sup>6</sup> al-Qurṭubī it would seem, disagreed; he introduces his comments to the entire verse with the following:

...from Ibn ʿAbbās: I do not know a better group of people than the companions of the Prophet and they did not question him except on thirteen questions all of which are found in the Qur'ān: "They are asking you about menstruation" [2/222] "They are asking you about the holy month" [2/217] "They are asking you about orphans" [2/220] and they did not ask except about what would profit them.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, in the Sīra itself, it is quite clear that the Muslims were as concerned about the matter as were the polytheists and that the revelation of the verse "relieved the Muslims of their anxiety in the matter".<sup>8</sup>

The second major problem glossed over by al-Suyūṭī is the matter of exactly when the killing occurred. While the Sīra agrees with al-Suyūṭī's statement that it was the end of Rajab, a powerful lobby suggests that the Muslims responsible for the killing thought the date was the last of Jumādā II while actually it was the first of Rajab. The problem may well lie in the understanding of how the situation arose to begin with;

Ibn Ishāq states that the Muslims were caught in a sacred "Catch-22": if they left Ibn al-Ḥaḍramī and his cohorts until the sacred month passed, they would reach the sanctity of the Meccan ḥaram.<sup>9</sup> A report in Mujāhid however, states that it was confusion on the part of the Muslims: they thought they were still in Jumādā II but actually it was the first of Rajab.<sup>10</sup> It may well be that we have here at play notions of intention versus ignorance in matters of action and especially sin. On the other hand, this may be a remnant of calendar disputes.<sup>11</sup>

Beyond all that, al-Ṭabarī's initial statement was not totally correct: al-Qurṭubī is able to cite a significant variant in the sabab even for this verse.

It is related that the occasion of revelation of the verse was that two men from Banū Kilāb met ʿAmr ibn Umayya al-Damrī who did not know that the two had joined the Prophet. It was the first day of Rajab and he killed the two of them. So Quraysh said: "He killed the two of them in the sacred month." So the verse was revealed.<sup>12</sup>

The fact that such a similar incident is attributed to this same ʿAmr ibn Umayya in connection with the Bi'r Maʿūna slaughter is significant; the two men ʿAmr is supposed to have killed in retribution for the Muslim deaths on that occasion were identified as members of Banū ʿAmir<sup>13</sup> and in that instance the men had an alliance (ʿaqd) rather than being with (ʿinda) the Prophet.<sup>14</sup> However, the possibility of motif development or of simple confusion between asbāb material is to be considered seriously.

There is a similar degree of unanimity on the question of the verse's halakhic importance; most opinion considers the verse abrogated. Makkī's discussion is typical: the verse is either abrogated by āyat al-sayf

(Q. 9/5), or Q. 9/29;<sup>15</sup> no argument is given and the abrogation would appear to be based on the well-known assumption that sūra 9 was the last to be revealed thus can abrogate anything else--such did not need to be stated for Makkī apparently.<sup>16</sup> Ibn al-ʿArabī, on the other hand, is able to suggest two other abrogants for the verse: Q. 9/36 and the sunna of the Prophet's battle in Dhū al-Qa'da.<sup>17</sup> It is to be noticed that neither Makkī nor Ibn al-ʿArabī consider it necessary or perhaps pertinent to adduce a sabab for the verse; the abrogation of the verse takes place on a much more general chronological level. But even on the question of abrogation there was not total unanimity; Makkī ascribes to ʿAtā' and Mujāhid the view that the verse is still a valid ruling.<sup>18</sup> The reasoning behind this, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, was that a general verse [i.e., āyat al-sayf] cannot abrogate a specific one "bi-ittifāq", by mutual agreement (i.e., 2/217 is limited to the holy months only).<sup>19</sup>

## Notes to 2/217

1. Al-Tabarī IV 301-302.
2. Al-Tabarī IV 302-311, reports 4082-4096, 4086 equals 'Abd al-Razzāq, p. 27.
3. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 60-64 and Wajīz, p. 57; also al-'Irāqī, ff. 4b-5b, a very detailed account; Berlin 3578, f. 12b; also see Muqātil, Tafsīr, ff. 34b-35a, close to Al-Wāḥidī's third report.
4. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 29; a similar summary in al-Qurṭubī III 40, his first report; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 321-322; Hibat Allāh, p. 20 with the note that 'Abd Allāh ibn Jaḥsh was the first (!) to go against the Jāhiliyya practice of the sacred months. Berlin 3578, ff. 12-13a, separates the report concerning verse 218; also see al-Qurṭubī III 49-50; al-Tabarī IV 219-220; al-Kalbī, p. 24.
5. Ibn Ishāq, Sīra, I 601-606, trans. Guillaume, Life of Muhammad, pp. 286-289, the report is repeated in al-Tabarī, report 4082; al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 61; al-Qurṭubī III 41-43, all with minor modifications. Also see al-Wāḥidī, al-Maghāzī, I 13-19.
6. E.g., al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 321-322.
7. Al-Qurṭubī III 40.
8. Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 604.
9. Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 603.
10. Mujāhid, pp. 104-105; also see al-Qurṭubī III 41; al-Tabarī, report 4085; al-'Irāqī, f. 4b.
11. See M.J. Kister, "Rajab is the month of God...", IOS I 191-223; also SM 47-48 and the question of Shabān versus Rajab for this expedition, a fact seemingly not mentioned in the tafsīr works.
12. Al-Qurṭubī III 40-41.
13. Note Ibn Hishām's comment (Sīra II 186) that it is said that the men were actually from Banū Sulaym. Also see Kister, "The expedition of Bi'r Ma'ūna", Gibb Festschrift, pp. 336-357, where it seems that Banū Kilāb is actually a part of Banū 'Āmir anyway (see pp. 346, 355). The account is further complicated by al-Kalbī, p. 24, who suggests that the verse was revealed twice, once about Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ and Miqdād ibn al-Aswad, and again about Ibn al-Ḥaḍramī. Kister goes to great lengths to suggest that the involvement of Sa'd in Bi'r Ma'ūna has been suppressed (only found in an isolated report in the Tafsīr of Abū Layth al-Samarqandī) and that in fact Sa'd may have been involved in the killing of the two men along with/instead of 'Amr. Thus the reports move full circle. All this only suggests to me the danger of trying to reconstruct history on the notion that isolated reports which go against the accepted versions are somehow more valuable. The possibility of motif development and plain confusion, as I would suggest is found in the asbāb material here, is not to be dismissed easily as Kister would have it.

14. See Ibn Ishāq, Sīra II 186: Quranic revelations connected to the event are 3/128 and 3/169.
15. Makkī, pp. 134-135; also al-Ṭabarī IV 313, reports 4097-4098; Hibat Allāh, p. 20.
16. See e.g., Makkī, p. 99, where it is explicitly stated that only a later verse can abrogate an earlier one and note the principle in explicit application ad 2/194.
17. Ibn al-ʿArabī I 147; also al-Qurṭubī III 43-44; al-Jassās I 321-322.
18. Makkī, pp. 135-135; also see al-Ṭabarī IV 314, report 4099; al-Qurṭubī III 43-44; al-Jassās I 321-322; a possibility not mentioned by Hibat Allāh.
19. Ibn al-ʿArabī I 147.

2/219a      They are asking you about wine and maysir.  
 Say: In them (both) is great sin and uses for  
 the people, but their sin is greater than  
 their use.

As in a case such as the qibla where the present direction of prayer is known and a scriptural prop must be found, so with wine; the exegetes come to the Qur'ān knowing fully well that wine is prohibited--the law is not in doubt. Any sense of scriptural contradiction to that point can either be eliminated by the notion of abrogation or through exegetical reworking (the more popular modern approach).

In the matter of wine, there are three<sup>1</sup> basic verses: 2/219a, 4/43 "Do not come to prayer when you are drunk" and 5/90 "Wine and maysir and divination by stones and arrows are impurity from the deeds of Satan", the last verse usually taken as representing a total prohibition of alcoholic beverages.<sup>2</sup>

The asbāb material for 2/219a is extremely limited, the most common statement being such as the following in al-Wāḥidī:

(The verse) was revealed about ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and Muʿādh ibn Jabl and a group from the Anṣār who came to the prophet and said: "Give us a ruling about wine and maysir for the two of them are destroyers of the intellect and plunderers of property." So God revealed this verse.<sup>3</sup>

This sabab, the only one found in al-Wāḥidī, is haggadic in nature, providing as it does the identification of the "they" who are asking the Prophet.

Al-Suyūṭī treats the matter in a different manner by deferring the discussion to Q. 5/90:

The Prophet came to Medina and they used to drink wine and consume (the rewards of) maysir. The prophet was asked about the



two of them so God revealed...[2/219]. The people said: "He did not prohibit (it) to us but rather said (it is) a great sin" and they (continued to) drink wine until a certain day [yawm min al-ayyām] when a man either from the Muhājirūn or the Ansār prayed the maghrib prayer and slipped in his (Quranic) recitation. So God revealed a stronger verse about it [i.e., 4/43]. Then an even stronger verse was revealed [i.e., 5/90]. 4

The discussion continues thereafter to raise the question of those who died before the ruling about wine but had indulged, a concern similar to that raised earlier over the qibla and probably over every other major instance of naskh. This sabab of al-Suyūṭī provides very little information--not even haggadic--other than a basic ordering according to sequence, a sequence based more on logic than definite historical detail. It would be difficult to argue, on the basis of this verse at least, that naskh is justified by actual historical information provided by asbāb information.<sup>5</sup>

## Notes to 2/219a

1. Five steps are cited by Hibat Allāh, pp. 20-21; four steps by al-Naḥḥās, p. 41.
2. A totally different approach to the half-verse is taken in Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 35b and Khams mi'a āya, f. 46a, where the prohibition of maysir is the focus.
3. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 64-65 and Wajīz, p. 58; Berlin 3578, f. 13a, only report; Hibat Allāh, p. 21, more expansive; al-Naḥḥās, p. 41; al-Kalbī, p. 24.
4. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 51 (ad 5/90); also Hibat Allāh, pp. 21-22 with greater detail; al-Ṭabarī IV 330-336; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 149 relates the entire process to progressive questioning by ʿUmar; also al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 323; basic ordering of verses only in al-Qurṭubī III 52.
5. Discussion takes place in al-Naḥḥās, on the basis of asbāb information, as to whether the verse is an abrogator (nāsikh) of a previous practice (as implied for example in al-Suyūṭī's sabab) a matter of interest perhaps but of little relevance to the halakha. Also see al-Baghdādī, Beyazit 445, f. 11b.

2/219b            They are asking you what they should give?  
                      Say: (what is) in excess.  
                      Thus God makes clear to you the signs.  
                      Perhaps you will consider.

Among the asbāb books, only al-Suyūṭī reports on this part of the verse; two reports are given, the first of which states:

When a group of the companions were ordered to spend in the way of God, they went to the prophet and said: "We do not know concerning this spending of which we have been ordered (what would be appropriate) among our possessions. What should we spend of them?" So God revealed...[2/219b]...

The second report states:

Muʿādh ibn Jabl and Thaʿlaba went to the prophet and said: "Oh prophet, we own slaves and their families. What should we spend of our possessions?" So God revealed this verse.<sup>1</sup>

The two reports are of the common narrative type, providing the desired identification of the "they" who are asking the question. What is surprising, perhaps, is that there seems to be no connection postulated between this verse and verse 215 where exactly the same question is posed but with a different answer. Al-Suyūṭī's reports however indicate a total exegetical separation of the two verses.

That separation, however, is not upheld in all exegetical works. It has already been noted above at verse 215 that Muqātil treats the two verses together in his tafsīr, out of order.<sup>2</sup> Al-Ṭabarī cites in his treatment of verse 219b a report given by al-Wāḥidī for verse 215, although he does not cite it in the form of a sabab.<sup>3</sup> Al-Qurṭubī too makes the connection between the two verses:

(Verse 215) was a question about to whom the gift should be given...but the second question in this verse is about the quantity

of the gift. This was about the matter of  
 'Amr ibn al-Jamūh, just as has  
 come before (at verse 215); when (verse  
 215) was revealed, he said: "How much should  
 I give?" So (verse 219b) was revealed.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, what appears to be within the Qur'ān a duplication is,  
 through the means of the sabab cited by al-Qurṭubī, put into a logical  
 sequence of progressive revelation. It seems significant that canonical  
 ordering does not seem an overriding concern in putting forth this exegesis;  
 an explanation of why there are intervening verses is of no concern.

## Notes to 2/219b

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p, 29.
2. See above p. 349 and Muqātil, Tasfīr, f. 34a.
3. Al-Ṭabarī IV 340, report 4170; see al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 60 and Wajīz, p. 59 and see above p. 347.
4. Al-Qurṭubī III 61; also al-Kalbī, p. 24.

2/220           In the world and the hereafter.  
                   They are asking you about orphans.  
                   Say: Setting things right for them is good.  
                   If you mix with them, they are your brothers.  
                   God knows the corrupter from those who do good.  
                   If God wished, he could have caused you grief.  
                   God is powerful and wise.

The asbāb information transmitted about this verse has as common factors both the notion of progressive revelation--a refining of the legal point--as an explanation of duplication in the Qur'ān and the incorporation of glosses on the notion of "setting things right" and "mixing".

Four different, although obviously related, scenarios are presented in the texts. The simplest is the following from al-Wāḥidī.

When "those who consume the property of orphans unjustly will consume fire in their bellies" (Q. 4/10) was revealed, they set (the orphans') property apart. So...[2/220]...was revealed and they mixed (the orphans') property with their own.<sub>1</sub>

A second report adds more detail especially with regard to the exegetical glosses:

When "Do not approach the property of the orphan except to improve it" (Q. 6/152) and... [Q. 4/10]...were revealed, he who kept the property of an orphan began to separate (the orphan's) food from his own food and his drink from his own drink and he took any leftovers of his food and put it away for him until (the orphan) ate it or it went bad. That was hard on them. So God revealed...[2/220]..., (that is), so mix their food with your food and their drink with your drink.<sub>2</sub>

Made clearer in this sabab is the extent to which the "mixing" was to take place such that provisions were shared, although it must be pointed out immediately that none of the ahkām texts consulted make this point based on the evidence of the sabab.

Two other reports are found which are similar to each other but provide a different identification of the person involved. Al-ʿIrāqī presents a report about ʿAbd Allāh ibn Rawāḥa who tells the prophet that he has heard the previous revelations about orphans and has thus separated everything "in the house and the food and the servants". He then asks the prophet if it would not be possible to mix such items. So the verse was revealed.<sup>3</sup> A very similar report but about Thābit ibn Rifāʿa is given by Muqātil and summed up extremely briefly in Berlin 3578.<sup>4</sup> Both of these reports display greater concern with haggadic matters, that is, the naming of the protagonist and the providing of a full dialogue. The exegetical intention remains the same but the means of providing it more involved in the narrative art.

## Notes to 2/220

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 65, first report; Berlin 3578, f. 13a, first report similar; also al-Ṭabarī IV 349, report 4182, but there the first revelation is Q. 6/152; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 330; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 154.
2. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 65, second report; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, pp. 29-30; al-Ṭabarī IV 350, report 4183, (reports 4184-4194, IV 350-353, are similar); al-Qurṭubī III 62; Berlin 3578, f. 13a, reports two and three are similar.
3. Al-ʿIrāqī, f. 5b; also al-Kalbī, p. 24 but shorter (al-ʿIrāqī gives no indication of his source); al-Qurṭubī III 63 also mentions the name of Rawāḥa as a possible questioner.
4. Berlin 3578, f. 13a, fourth report; Muqātil, Tafsīr, ff. 35b-36a.



2/221

Do not marry polytheist women until they believe.  
 A believing slave-woman is better than a polytheist,  
 even though she appeals to you.  
 Do not allow (your daughter) to marry a  
 polytheist until they believe.  
 A believing slave is better than a polytheist,  
 even though he appeals to you.  
 These call to the fire  
 while God calls to the garden and (to) forgiveness  
 by his permission, making clear his  
 signs to the people; perhaps they will remember.

Two basic halakhic points are derived from this verse, both of which are elaborated in the asbāb material. The first point relates to marrying a polytheist woman; on that topic two reports are found, one really being merely an elaboration of the other:

Marthad al-Ghanawī, a Muslim, wanted to marry ʿAnāq, a poor polytheist Qurayshite who was quite beautiful. He went to the prophet asking for permission, "I am enamoured with her". So the verse was revealed.<sup>1</sup>

The fuller report relates to the same people but gives a full narrative account, most elaborately in Muqātil's Tafsīr, explaining that Marthad had been sent back to Mecca by the prophet in order to help some Muslims to escape from there. During his trip, he encountered ʿAnāq, who wanted to marry him. So upon his return, Marthad asked for permission which was, of course, denied by the revelation.<sup>2</sup> The sabab in either version serves an exegetical purpose primarily elaborating the plain sense of the Quranic verse.

A similar situation occurs with the phrase "A believing slave is better than a polytheist":

[The verse] was revealed about ʿAbd Allāh ibn Rawāḥa, who had a black slave. He hit her out of anger but then repented. He came to the prophet and told him. "What is she?" Muḥammad asked. He said: "She fasts, prays, is proficient

at ablutions and the shahāda." So Muḥammad said: "This is a believer". So Ibn Rawāḥa said: "I will free her and marry her". So he did it. Muslims taunted him saying: "He married a slave", meaning he had married an unbeliever. So God revealed this verse.<sup>3</sup>

The main legal problem in regard to this verse is its relationship to Q. 5/5 and its ruling allowing marriage to scriptuary women. The question arises concerning the relationship of the two verses; does sūra 2 abrogate sūra 5, as some reports claim (especially those connected with the report of Ibn 'Umar stating "I know of no greater polytheist than the woman who says her lord is 'Isā or one of the servants of God,"<sup>4</sup>) or does sūra 5 limit the applicability of sūra 2? The whole problem revolves around scriptuaries, an element not present in the asbāb accounts at all. It is not surprising therefore that neither al-Jaṣṣāṣ nor Ibn al-'Arabī in the ahkām texts, neither Hibat Allāh nor al-Naḥḥās in the naskh texts, cite any sabab for this verse.<sup>5</sup>

## Notes to 2/221

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 66, first report and Wajīz, p. 59; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 30; al-Kalbī, p. 25.
2. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 67, third report; al-ʿIrāqī, f. 6a; Berlin 3578, f. 13a; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 36a; al-Qurṭubī III 67.
3. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 66-67, second report; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 30; Berlin 3578, ff. 13a-13b; al-Qurṭubī III 69-70; al-Ṭabarī IV 368.
4. E.g., al-Qurṭubī III 68.
5. See al-Jassās I 332-336; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 156-158; al-Naḥḥās, pp. 57-61; Hibat Allāh, pp. 24-25; although al-Qurṭubī cites the asbāb, he does not use them in his discussions, which, like the others, revolves around scriptuaries and marriage.

2/222

They are asking you about menstruation.  
 Say: it is an injury.  
 So keep away from women in (their) periods,  
 and do not approach them until they are pure.  
 When they have purified themselves, go to them  
 whenever God orders you.  
 God loves the penitents and loves those  
 who purify themselves.

A number of reports for this verse simply provide an identification of the "they" who are asking the question. The exact name varies, perhaps due to orthographic problems (Abū'l-Daḥdāḥ,<sup>1</sup> Ibn al-Daḥdāḥ,<sup>2</sup> Ibn al-Daḥḥāḥ,<sup>3</sup> Ibn al-Dajāja<sup>4</sup>), but the function is, of course, the same, directed towards an identification of the unknown.

Other reports show a concern to provide the background information. Generally ascribed to Jews, the same practices are found in some reports attributed to the polytheists, a common phenomenon noted previously.<sup>5</sup> A typical report is the following:

When one of the Jewish women had her period,  
 the men used not to eat with her or have  
 intercourse with her in the house. The  
 companions asked the Prophet about that  
 so...[2/222]...was revealed.<sup>6</sup>

The emphasis found in all the explanatory glosses to this is that while the Jews (or the polytheists) used to banish their women away totally, only intercourse was to be forbidden to Muslims.

The sabab certainly has its halakhic point and is, indeed, employed for that purpose in some texts. For al-Naḥḥās the sabab is cited explicitly to prove that this is an instance of abrogation of previous practice (although it is abrogation by the Qur'ān of Sunna only); but furthermore, al-Naḥḥās draws out from the sabab substantiation of the notion that it is only vaginal intercourse that is forbidden, for all other things were allowed by the verse, except those related to the "injury".<sup>7</sup> This point is raised

by Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Jaṣṣāṣ<sup>8</sup> as well, while discussing the sabab, and it becomes a complicated question due to problems over the definition of adh<sup>an</sup> ("injury") and maḥiḍ (here translated "menstruation", but properly person, place or time of menstruation). Ibn al-ʿArabī, on the basis of the sabab once again, states that maḥiḍ should be taken as "time of menstruation" since that is what the questioner was asking about. On the basis of the sabab, then, a number of legal points are discussed although the variety of answers and opinions put forth (e.g., in the question of whether only vaginal entrance is forbidden) indicates that asbāb information can be interpreted as divergently as the actual Quranic text itself.

Another series of asbāb reports, although showing some confusion between applicability to this verse and the following one, indicates, perhaps, reports directed to a different halakhic interpretation of the verse:

The Jews said: "He who engages in anal intercourse with his wife (will produce) a cross-eyed child". The women of the Anṣār however did not stop their spouses from entering them thusly. So they went to the prophet and asked him about having intercourse with their wives during the periods and about what the Jews said. So God revealed...[2/222]...<sup>9</sup>

This basic report, which is found also à propos of verse 223, is supplemented in a sense by reports found in Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Ṭabarī<sup>10</sup> stating that the Arabs used to partake of anal intercourse while their wives had their periods. This, by implication at least, was what was prohibited by the revelation of this verse; indeed, one of the interpretations put forth by Ibn al-ʿArabī (but ultimately rejected by him) is that this was the only thing forbidden by the verse. The sabab may therefore be attempting to put forth a different halakhic statement concerning the verse. On the

other hand, the halakhic statements deduced from it (which are unanimously rejected) may well have derived from these reports (rather than the process occurring in the reverse direction) and the sabab itself arose through interaction with the following verse and considerations of context.

## Notes to 2/222

1. Al-Kalbī, p. 25; al-Wāḥidī, Wajīz, p. 60.
2. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 30, second report.
3. Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 36a; the whole of Muqātil's report is extensive but is more of an exegetical comment than a sabab (although introduced by the phrase nazalat fī) for it deals with the post-revelation situation.
4. Al-ʿIrāqī, f. 6a; cf., Berlin 3578, f. 13b: Ibn al-Daḥāḥa.
5. Reports concerning the polytheists occur in al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 68-69, third report; al-Ṭabarī IV 373, report 5431; see G. Vajda, "Juifs et Musulmans selon le Ḥadīth" JA 229(1937) 69-75.
6. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 30, first report; al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 67-68, first report; Berlin 3578, f. 13b, first report; al-Qurṭubī III 81; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 158; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 336; al-Naḥḥās, p. 61; no Jewish reports are found in al-Ṭabarī for this verse.
7. Al-Naḥḥās, p. 61.
8. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 336; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 158-163.
9. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 68 second report.
10. Ibn al-ʿArabī I 159; al-Ṭabarī IV 373-374, report 4233.

2/223           Your wives are a tilth for you;  
                   so go to your tilth as you wish  
                   and look forward for yourselves  
                   and fear God and know that  
                   you will meet him and give  
                   the good tidings to the believers.

This rather disjointed verse receives much comment in the form of asbāb reports, most especially in connection with the phrase "as you wish".

As was mentioned above in the treatment of verse 222, a popular report for this verse involves the Jews and their warnings given to the Muslims concerning sexual intercourse. In al-Wāḥidī, seven reports are given for this verse, four of which relate to the Jews; the Jews warn the believers that they will produce cross-eyed children if they have intercourse from the rear, kneeling or prostrate as in prayer (muḥibbiya).<sup>1</sup> Al-Ṭabarī adds to this list standing, sitting or side-by-side.<sup>2</sup>

A variation on this basic Jewish report occurs with the Jews appealing to scriptural authority:

...(the Jews) said: "We find in the book  
 of God, in the Torah, that all entering of  
 women other than in the lying down (face to  
 face) positions [mustalqiyāt] are unclean  
 according to God."<sup>3</sup>

The retort to this claim, as contained in the revelation of the verse, is described as God calling the Jews liars (akḏhaba), implicitly expressing the notion that there is either Jewish alteration of the Torah taking place of just plain lying. Thus a polemical motif is added to the more basic report with its undoubted halakhic import of describing sexual positions which are, in fact, permitted.

One quite different report relates to 'Umar:



ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb came to the prophet and said: "I am destroyed!" He replied: "And what is this that has destroyed you?" (ʿUmar) said: "I have changed my stopping place at night." (The prophet) did not rebuke him at all, so there was revealed to the Prophet this verse [2/223], (that is), from the front or from the rear but avoid anal intercourse and menstruating women.<sup>4</sup>

The narrative makes clear the legal positions for intercourse, clarifying that the verse does, indeed, refer to such matters. A third sabab, however, presents a somewhat different interpretation of the verse; the verse, the report suggests, "was revealed about seclusion."<sup>5</sup> This is explained further by al-Ṭabarī for example<sup>6</sup> as meaning that if one wished to have relations in private, one may, and if not, then not--"as you wish", as the Qur'ān states. The verse is thus interpreted by this report to be relevant not to the style of intercourse but rather to the locale.

These reports, for the most part, are predominately anecdotal rather than halakhic in direction; the main legal point made here is that any sexual position is allowed so long as it will be productive (al-Jaṣṣāṣ, for example, derives this point from the Quranic "so go to your tilth" and ignores the asbāb reports<sup>7</sup>). None of the asbāb reports make this point explicit but, at most, seem more interested in documenting variant (and aberrant) sexual positions that are or are not allowed. Such reports serve, at best, as examples but not for the most part as material from which general legal rulings can be deduced.

## Notes to 2/223

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 69-72, reports 1, 3, 4 and 7, although on 7 see below at note 3 (also his Wajīz, p. 61); also see al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Tafsīr VI 39; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 30, first report; al-Qurṭubī III 91; Berlin 3578, f. 13b, second report.
2. Al-Ṭabarī IV 400 report 4318; the terminology of sexual practices is somewhat confusing, especially as related to the root D-B-R in reference to anal intercourse (generally forbidden - sometimes glossed as the "act of Lot's family") and entrance from the rear (generally permitted). On certain occasions (more especially in verse 222 but also in 223) it has proven difficult to determine what is being referred to. For the most part, however, the actual practice is not the important element in the discussion; rather the emphasis is always on the principle underlying the various opinions.
3. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 71-72, seventh report; Berlin 3578, f. 13b, second report; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 36b (specified as Ḥuyayy ibn Akḥṭab) and Khams mi'a āya, f. 57a (unnamed).
4. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 71, fifth report; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 30, second report; Berlin 3578, f. 13b, third report; al-Ṭabarī IV 412-413, report 4347; al-Qurṭubī III 92. I take the phrase حَوَّلَتْ رَحْلِيَّ اللَّيْلَةَ to refer to how 'Umar performed sexually with his wife.
5. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 71, sixth report; Berlin 3578, f. 13b, fourth report.
6. Al-Ṭabarī IV 408, reports 4335-4336.
7. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 351-352.

2/22<sup>4</sup>

Do not make God a hindrance, due to your oaths,  
to your acting virtuously and piously and  
making peace among the people.  
God is hearing and knowing.

A wide variety of reports is found for this verse, with little agreement on the matter being found among the asbāb books. A number of the reports are brief, presenting no more than a slight elaboration of the Quranic phraseology.

(It was revealed) about a man who swore he would not visit his relatives nor bring peace among the people.<sub>1</sub>

(It was revealed) about Abū Bakr who swore not to visit his son ʿAbd al-Raḥmān unless he converted.<sub>2</sub>

A report about ʿAbd Allāh ibn Rawāḥa is also found in a similar minimal form<sup>3</sup> but also in another version with a more extensive narrative:

(The verse) was revealed about ʿAbd Allāh ibn Rawāḥa, forbidding him from breaking relations with his son-in-law, Bashīr ibn al-Nuʿmān. That was that Ibn Rawāḥa had sworn that he would never visit him, nor speak with him nor bring peace between him and his wife. He said: "I swear by God that I will not do (it) nor shall it be permitted to me that I not be truthful in my oath". So God revealed this verse.<sub>4</sub>

Despite its length, the sabab simply provides, as do the simpler forms, a gloss on "acting virtuously and piously" in the Qur'ān.

Another sabab relates to quite a different situation and is summed up in al-Suyūṭī by a simple statement: "It was revealed about Abū Bakr in the matter of Miṣṭah";<sup>5</sup> that is, it revolves around the affair of "the lie" about ʿĀ'isha and Abū Bakr's decision not to give money to Miṣṭah, his relative who was needy, because of the latter's role in spreading the false story. In the Sīra of Ibn Ishāq, Abū Bakr's mind is changed by the revelation of Q. 24/22:

Let not those among you who possess dignity  
and resources swear not to give to relatives  
and the poor and those who emigrate in the  
way of God...<sup>6</sup>

Neither 2/22<sup>4</sup> nor 24/22 figures in abrogation discussions so it is apparent that, halakhically, the two are seen to agree with each other (naẓīr according to al-Jaṣṣāṣ<sup>7</sup>) and that they should both have the same sabab is therefore no reason for surprise within the tradition of Quranic exegesis.

The legal point derived from the verse is not actually supported in al-Jaṣṣāṣ or Ibn al-ʿArabī by citation of the sabab;<sup>8</sup> alternative interpretations are presented of not making oaths that will stand in the way of the piety of the swearer, not making oaths that will hinder one from doing good because they cannot be fulfilled or simply not making oaths (i.e., swearing by God) in everything that one does. Al-Qurṭubī,<sup>9</sup> however, does employ the asbāb information - all of it - in order precisely to enumerate examples of piety which could be impeded by oaths. Thus specific instances can serve a halakhic purpose even where the verse is conceived as general in application.

## Notes to 2/224

1. Berlin 3578, f. 13b, third report.
2. Al-ʿIrāqī, f. 6a, first report; Berlin 3578, f. 13b, second report; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 36b and in general terms in Khams mi'a āya, f. 78b; also see al-Qurṭubī III 97, where Abū Bakr swears not to eat with his guests.
3. Al-ʿIrāqī, f. 6a, second report; Berlin 3578, f. 13b, first report; al-Kalbī, p. 25.
4. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 72, Wajīz, p. 61.
5. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 31; also al-Qurṭubī III 97.
6. See Ibn Ishāq, Sīra II 303.
7. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 354.
8. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 353-354; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 174-175.
9. Al-Qurṭubī III 97.

2/226

For those who perform the ilā' from their wives,  
a wait of four months (is required).  
If they return, then God is forgiving and beneficent.

The ilā' or waiting period for the annulment of marriage was according to some asbāb information a pre-Islamic practice which came in for reform under Islam:

The waiting period for the people in the Jāhiliya was a year or two years or even more. God set the time at four months. He whose waiting period is less than four months, he has not (performed) the waiting period.<sup>1</sup>

The sabab is like many others in that it establishes the background against which the Qur'ān may be compared; it also provides what appears to be some rather obvious legal information that the ilā' under four months does not count. No ahkām text consulted cites this sabab for the purpose of demonstrating this rather simplistic statement. Note too that the connection between the revelation of the verse and the narrative is not explained, not even by the statement "Somebody asked the prophet about that"; it is not a surprise therefore to find the sabab omitted from al-Suyūṭī.

A second sabab also occurs:

The ilā' was one of the hardships of the Jāhiliya. When a man did not want a woman but did not wish her to marry somebody other than him, he swore that he would never again approach her and would thereby leave her neither as a widow nor as one possessing a master. So God assigned the term of four months that a man must be away from a woman for those who know.<sup>2</sup>

Here again, the background picture is sketched, with the specification that it was a "hardship". The elaboration contained in the sabab of exactly what the man did may be thought to be of some halakhic relevance, especially considering the debate which takes place in exegetical works over the precise nature of the oath that must be sworn, if any, to effect the ilā'. Yet

once again, the sabab finds no place in the detailed discussions; its purpose seems to be solely to provide that background context.

## Notes to 2/226

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p.72, first report; Berlin 3578, ff. 13b-14a, first report; al-Qurṭubī III 103; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 177.
2. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 72-73, second report; Berlin 3578, f. 14a, second report.



2/228

Divorced women shall wait by themselves for three periods (during which) it is not permitted for them to hide what God creates in their wombs if they believe in God and the last day. Their husbands have the better right for their return in that (period) if they wish reconciliation. To them are honourable rights the like of which are imposed upon them. But to men are (rights) over them by a degree. God is mighty and wise.

A variety of asbāb reports is found for this verse, although none are found in al-Wāḥidī. The first report of al-Suyūṭī fits the category of reports which views the verse in contrast with pre-Islamic practice (or more specifically in this case, pre-revelation practice):

Asmā'i bint Yazīd ibn al-Sukn said: I was divorced according to the covenant of the prophet when there was no waiting period for the divorced woman. So God revealed the waiting period for divorce...<sup>1</sup>

Berlin 3578 changes the emphasis slightly in presenting the background:

A divorced woman, if she detested her divorced husband would hide her pregnancy. But if she wished (to get her husband back), she would lie about (her periods).<sup>2</sup>

The waiting period was thus instituted so that it would be plain to all if the woman was pregnant or not.

A third report is more specific in citing an incident, making the gloss of "what God creates" in the Quranic verse quite explicit as pregnancy:

Ismā'īl ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Ghafārī divorced his wife Qatila according to the covenant of the prophet but he did not know that she was pregnant. He found out (about it) and returned to her; she gave birth, died and her child died. So the verse was revealed.<sup>3</sup>

The intent of this sabab would seem to be to say that if the man had waited for the yet-to-be-revealed waiting period, she would have died already and he would not have been married to her. The fact that this sabab is not cited (nor is any other) in the discussions by al-Jaṣṣāṣ and Ibn al-ʿArabī (who says that this is "one of the most difficult verses legally"),<sup>4</sup> leaves the precise implications of the report somewhat ambiguous. Regardless, the major dispute over the verse is exactly how to count the three periods (time from menstruation or purification?), a problem about which the sabab has no information to supply. The point of the various reports is to sketch out the background for exegetical purposes but, apparently, not to supply legally relevant information.<sup>5</sup>

## Notes to 2/228

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 31, first report.
2. Berlin 3578, f. 14a.
3. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 31, second report; al-ʿIrāqī, f. 6a, two reports, one concerning Ismāʿīl, another about a similar situation with Mālik ibn al-Ashraf and his spouse; Hibat Allāh, p. 25; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 37a; al-Baghdādī, Beyazit 445, f. 15b.
4. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 364-374; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 183-189; al-Qurṭubī III 112-125.
5. A terminological note in al-Ṭabarī: ثم اختلف قائلو ذلك في السبب الذي من اجله نهيت عن كتمان ذلك الرجل (IV 520) -- none of his reports (IV 520-522) contain the phrase nazalat fī.

2/229

Divorce twice, then either hold fast in honour  
or leave in kindness.

It is not permitted to you that you take anything  
from that which you gave them except when both  
fear that the two of them will not be able to  
maintain the rules of God.

If you fear that the two of them will not be  
able to maintain the rules of God, there is no blame  
on the two of them in what she ransoms herself with.  
These are the rules of God, do not transgress them.  
He who transgresses the rules of God,  
those are the wrong doers.

The first part of the verse regarding divorcing twice is contrasted  
in the asbāb reports with the previous practice of multiple divorces and  
the unfair position that thus resulted:

A man used to divorce his wife then return to her  
before the expiry of her waiting period (ʿidda).  
A man from the Anṣār got angry at his  
wife and said: "I will not approach you but  
you will not be free from me." She said to him:  
"How (is that)?" He said: "I will divorce you  
until your term is up, then I will return to you."  
So she complained about that to the prophet and  
God revealed...[2/229]...<sub>1</sub>

This process of returning to one's divorced wife was repeated  
over a hundred times according to some reports. Once again, however, the  
sabab avoids what is the major controversy concerning this verse, whether  
the total number of legal divorces allowed is two or three, the third being  
implied in the phrase "leave in kindness."<sup>2</sup> The sabab provides the contextual  
background for legal interpretation, but provides little information for legal  
purposes.

A similar situation holds with the reports which are transmitted  
concerning the second part of the verse:

A man would consume his wife's property from her  
dowry which he gave to her and other (items) in  
her possession. He did not think that (the action)  
would be held against him. So God revealed: "It is  
not permitted to you to take anything from that  
which you gave them..." [2/229].<sub>3</sub>

This report provides little above the basic background information that the opposite situation occurred prior to the Quranic revelation; another report gives more substantive detail:

(The verse) was revealed about Thābit ibn Qays and (his wife) Ḥabība. She complained about him to the prophet. He said: "Would you return his garden to him?" She said: "Yes." So the prophet called (Thābit) and mentioned that to him. (Thābit) said: "And she will be pleased with me thereby?" He said: "Yes." So Thābit said: "I will do (it)." So "It is not permitted..." [2/229] was revealed.<sup>4</sup>

This somewhat cryptic report, which exhibits a certain amount of textual variation,<sup>5</sup> indicates that the prophet approved of a system whereby a man's garden, which he had apparently given to his wife, was returned to him in order for her to gain a divorce from him. Al-ʿIrāqī then states in his version of the report that this was the first khullʿa, divorce given in return for compensation, to occur in Islam;<sup>6</sup> the report therefore fits into a motif of asbāb reports giving the "first occurrence" of a certain act. The sabab acts, as well, to establish the legitimacy of the whole procedure, the process of juridical ruling involved and, of course, the Quranic prop for the (previously established) practice.

One final report given by al-Wāḥidī states that "A woman came to (ʿĀ'isha) and asked her about something concerning divorce. ʿĀ'isha said 'I mentioned it to the prophet' so...[2/229]...was revealed."<sup>7</sup> The aim of this sabab and its point of reference is unspecified and unknown; that the role of ʿĀ'isha here is supposed to be in competition with the role of ʿUmar and his muwāfaqāt or ʿAli is certainly a possibility.

## Notes to 2/229

1. Ibn al-ʿArabī I 189; al-Ṭabarī IV 539, report 4779; similar to al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 73, first report; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 32, first report; Berlin 3578, f. 14a; al-Naḥḥās, pp. 68-69; al-Qurṭubī III 126.
2. E.g., al-Qurṭubī III 129; al-Jaṣṣās I 379.
3. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 32, second report; similar in Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 37a.
4. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 32, third report; al-ʿIrāqī, ff. 6a-6b; Berlin 3578, f. 14a; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 37b; al-Qurṭubī III 139; al-Ṭabarī IV 557, report 4811; the identification also occurs in al-Kalbī, p. 26.
5. E.g., in al-Ṭabarī one phrase reads "And that will be pleasing to me?" rather than "And she will be pleased with me thereby?"
6. Al-ʿIrāqī, f. 6b; also al-Qurṭubī III 139; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 37b.
7. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 73, second report.

2/230

If he divorces her, she is not permitted to him after then until she marries a different spouse and he divorces her.

There is no sin on the two of them if they return, if they think that they can maintain the rules of God.

These are the rules of God (which) he explains to a people who understands.

Al-Suyūṭī and al-ʿIrāqī stand alone among the asbāb books and almost all the exegetical works consulted in citing a sabab for this verse.

(The verse) was revealed about ʿĀ'isha bint ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAtīk, who was living with Rifāʿa ibn Wahb ibn ʿAtīk (he was the son of her uncle). He divorced her with the final divorce and she married ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Zubayr al-Qurazī after him. He then divorced her. She then went to the prophet and said: "He divorced me before having slept with me. May I return to (my) first (husband)?" So...[2/230]...was revealed. So he slept with her and divorced her after that; thus there was no sin on the two of them when they rejoined.<sup>1</sup>

The same identification of the protagonists is made in al-Kalbī and al-Ṭabarī,<sup>2</sup> and a shortened version of the report is found in Muqātil,<sup>3</sup> but the report is remarkable by its absence in the ahkām texts, especially considering its halakhic relevance. Much debate goes on in these texts whether intercourse is necessary to confirm the legal status of the intervening marriage, the precise point with which this sabab is concerned.<sup>4</sup> It may well be the rather cynical approach towards the law displayed by the protagonists that made the sabab unpopular and not fit to repeat; its absence may, on the other hand, be merely co-incidence due to a lack of circulation of the report. The appeal to ijmāʿ is made by al-Ṭabarī<sup>5</sup> in order to prove the need for intercourse to legalize the marriage. A sabab may well be halakhic in application or even in origin but that fact does not necessarily mean that it will be used for such purposes.

## Notes to 2/230

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 32; al-ʿIrāqī, f. 6b, somewhat shortened.
2. Al-Kalbī, p. 26; al-Ṭabarī IV 588-596, especially report 4893.
3. Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 37b.
4. E.g., Ibn al-ʿArabī I 198; al-Qurṭubī III 147-148.
5. Al-Ṭabarī IV 588-589.



2/231

When you divorce the women and they have reached their term, either take them back honourably or set them free honourably. Do not take them back injuriously in order to take advantage. He who does that, he has wronged his soul. Do not take the signs of God as a joke but remember the blessing of God on you and what was revealed to you in the book and the wisdom, warning you thereby. Fear God and know that God knows all things.

Once again, only al-Suyūṭī cites reports for this verse; the first two reports relate to the very first part of the verse:

A man would divorce his wife then return to her before the termination of her waiting period. He would then divorce her (again). He would do that to injure her and to prevent her from marrying. So God revealed this verse.<sup>1</sup>

While a certain attempt at exegetical gloss is incorporated in this sabab, specifically the Quranic ajal is glossed by the more precise ʿidda, the main emphasis seems to be, once again, to provide evidence of contrary practice prior to the ruling. The second report is very similar in intent, but adds the name of the protagonists, Thābit ibn Yasār,<sup>2</sup> thus fulfilling the haggadic function more fully.

The third report cited by al-Suyūṭī relates to the revelation of "Do not take the signs of God as a joke" and is similar in purpose and intent to the above reports.

A man divorced (his wife) then said: "I was joking"; and he set free (his wife), then said: "I was joking." So God revealed: "Do not take the signs of God as a joke."<sup>3</sup>

The Quranic "signs of God" are glossed here as relating to divorce procedures, a point established for most exegetes by the clear context.

The gloss of the Quranic huzuw<sup>an</sup> as lā'ib<sup>an</sup>, however, is the common gloss cited, often supported by variations on this report.<sup>4</sup> This exegetical intent is undoubtedly primary in the sabab with the background motif only minor.

## Notes to 2/231

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 32; also see al-Ṭabarī V 8-11, especially 9, report 4913; Sufyān al-Thawrī, p. 27.
2. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, pp. 32-33; also the identification is found in Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 37b.
3. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 33.
4. E.g., al-Qurtubī III 157; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 398; al-Ṭabarī V 13-14.

2/232

When you divorce the women and they reach their term, do not prevent them from marrying their husbands if they come to terms between themselves honourably. That is the preaching to those among you who believe in God and the last day. That is cleaner and purer for you. God knows and you do not know.

The asbāb material for this verse divides between specification of two people who tried to prevent the marriage of a woman under their care. The most popular identification is presented in three different versions by al-Wāḥidī as well as being cited by al-Suyūṭī and Berlin 3578.

Ma'qil ibn Yasār narrated: I had given my sister in marriage to a man. He divorced her, then, when her waiting-period was over, he came to propose to her. I said to him: "I let you marry, I supported you and honoured you, then you divorced her. Now you come to propose to her. No, by God, you may never return!" He narrated: The man had no objection and the woman wished to return to him. So God revealed this verse. I then said: "Now I will do it, oh prophet!" So I married her to him.<sup>1</sup>

A clearly less popular although fairly widely circulated report is the following:

Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī had care of the daughter of his uncle, whose spouse divorced her. She completed her waiting period, then he returned wanting her to return to him: Jābir refused. He said: "You divorced a daughter of our uncle; now you wish to marry her again?" The woman wanted her spouse (again) because she was pleased with him. So this verse was revealed.<sup>2</sup>

Once again, these reports provide the background information of the fact that an act contrary to the Quranic regulation took place but the Qur'ān then corrected the situation. The sabab also includes a gloss of the Quranic 'aḍala as mana'a "to prevent". But the importance of the reports is much greater than that, and it would seem that they have been tailored to their purpose. Both al-Qurṭubī<sup>3</sup> and Ibn al-'Arabī<sup>4</sup> cite the sabab of Ma'qil in order to support their position that marriage is not permitted

without a guardian to give permission. As al-Qurṭubī states: "Marriage is not permitted without a guardian because the sister of Ma'qil was a divorcee and if she had been able to marry by herself, then there would have been no need for Ma'qil."<sup>5</sup> Quite explicitly, the sabab establishes the truth of this position for al-Qurṭubī. It would thus seem significant that in both versions of the sabab a reference is made to the fact that the woman in question wanted to re-marry but could not because of the lack of permission. Such a reference, unnatural to the narrative flow of both reports, is undoubtedly a reference made in the story so that the specific halakhic point can be made.

As is acknowledged by al-Qurṭubī, the school of Abū Ḥanīfa does not agree with this ruling; basing themselves on verse 230, "If he divorces her, she is not permitted to him after that until she marries a different spouse and he divorces her", in which there is no mention of a guardian, they reject the entire notion. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ,<sup>6</sup> being a Hanifite, represents this position. Towards the end of his multi-page argument he mentions the sabab of Ma'qil, in two versions, and rejects it on the grounds of its isnād.<sup>7</sup> Isnād criticism is obviously a tool which can be employed when needed and disregarded when not. The fact that the report is found in al-Bukhārī makes no difference to al-Jaṣṣāṣ who is quite apparently in the position of having to reject the sabab.

## Notes to 2/232

1. Al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, pp. 73-74, first report, also see his second and third reports, pp. 74-75 and Wajīz, p. 65; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 33, first report; Berlin 3578, f. 14a, first report; al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Tafsīr VI 39-40; al-Ṭabarī V 17-21, reports 4927-4938; Mujāhid, p. 109; al-Kalbī, p. 26; Muqātil, Tafsīr, ff. 37b-38a and Khams mi'a āya, f. 62a, with full identification of all the actors.
2. Al-Wāhidī, Asbāb, pp. 75-76 fourth report; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 33, second report; Berlin 3578, ff. 14a-14b, second report; al-Ṭabarī V 21-22, report 4939.
3. Al-Qurṭubī III 158, in five different versions.
4. Ibn al-ʿArabī I 201.
5. Al-Qurṭubī III 158-159.
6. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 399-403.
7. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 402.

2/238 Be mindful of the prayers and the middle prayer,  
and stand before God quietly (qānitīn).

There are two problematic words in this verse both of which have produced asbāb material incorporating glosses. Only al-Suyūṭī among the asbāb books, however, bothers to isolate them. The first report revolves around "the middle prayer".

The prophet used to pray the midday prayer (zuhr) during the mid-day heat. The prayer was difficult for his companions. So...[2/238]...was revealed.<sub>1</sub>

The next two reports revolve around what is here translated as "quietly":

We were talking about the covenant of the prophet during the prayer. A man was talking to his companion who was beside him at the prayer until the verse was revealed. So we were ordered to be silent and prohibited from talking.<sub>2</sub>

They were talking during the prayer and the man used to inform his brother of his needs. So the verse was revealed.<sub>3</sub>

A final report seems to be an attempt to incorporate both glosses:

The prophet was praying the noon prayer in the mid-day and there was only a row or two of people behind him. (The rest) of the people were talking and trading. So God revealed...[2/238]...<sub>4</sub>

All of these latter three reports involve the gloss qānitīn as "ceasing from talking" and the first and the last reports gloss al-ṣalāt al-wuṣṭā as the noon prayer (zuhr).

These reports and glosses are widespread in the exegetical literature consulted but only scrape the surface of the debate concerning these words. Al-Qurṭubī proffers a total of ten different glosses for the "middle prayer", Ibn al-ʿArabī, seven,<sup>5</sup> all of which favour the ʿaṣr prayer rather than the zuhr notwithstanding the fact that the sabab is generally cited in

support of the latter. Likewise with qāmitīn; obedience, standing, silence and humility are four glosses often cited.<sup>6</sup> One of the asbāb given above is generally cited to support the gloss of "silence" but, even so, most exegetes opt for a meaning which incorporates all the senses rather than one specifically (e.g., it is often translated as "devoutly").

Thus, while the asbāb information is certainly quoted by the exegetes to support a gloss, it is certainly not definitive to any extent; it may well be that al-Wāḥidī perceived that the reports did not support his understanding of the verse and thus, in order to maintain his claim that the asbāb are the key to exegesis, he excluded the reports from his book.

A terminological note from al-Ṭabarī is of interest; after citing numerous reports giving the simple gloss al-ṣalāt al-wuṣṭā = al-zuhr, he then gives the asbāb reports stating that these are the ʿilla for the gloss.



## Notes to 2/238

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p.33, first report.
2. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 33, third report.
3. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 33, fourth report.
4. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 33, second report.
5. Al-Qurṭubī III 209-212; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 224-225; also al-Jassās I 442; al-Ṭabarī V 168-182, 198-207.
6. Al-Qurṭubī III 213-214; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 226; al-Jassās I 443-433; al-Ṭabarī V 228-234, esp. 232, report 5524; al-Naḥḥās, p. 17, cites the report while entertaining the possibility that the verse is an abrogant to previous permission to talk during prayer.

2/240 For those among you who die and leave wives behind, a bequest to their wives for support for a year without expulsion (is necessary). If they leave, there is no sin upon you for what they do with themselves honourably. God is powerful and wise.

A great deal of discussion takes place in the exegetical works concerning the abrogation of the provisions of this verse, the year period by the four months and ten days of Q. 2/234 and the bequest by the inheritance laws stipulated in Q. 4/11.<sup>1</sup> In none of these extensive discussions, however, is a sabab cited, even though al-Wāhidī, al-Suyūṭī and Berlin 3578 all do have a report transmitted on the authority of Muqātil ibn Ḥibbān (note although that a very similar report is found in Muqatil (ibn Sulaymān)'s Tafsīr):

That was that a man from al-Ṭā'if came to Medina with his male and female offspring, his father and his wife. He died in Medina. That (situation) was presented to the prophet. He gave to the parents and his children in just proportions (bi'l-ma'rūf) but did not give his wife anything except that he ordered them (the family) to give her gifts from the estate of her husband for the period of a year.<sup>2</sup>

In Muqātil's Tafsīr this man is identified as Ḥākim ibn al-Ashraf.<sup>3</sup> The sabab would certainly seem to be halakhically neutral in that it provides no information such that the event could be dated in a certain way nor does it specify exact proportions of distribution. The sabab is appropriate to the haggadic context of a work such as that of Muqātil in that it provides the background information and colour.

## Notes to 2/240

1. Al-Qurṭubī III 226-228; al-Jassās I 420-421; al-Tabarī V 250-260.
2. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 76 and similar in Wajīz, p. 67; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 34; Berlin 3578, f. 14b.
3. Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 39b; also see his Khams mi'a āya, ff. 64a-64b.

2/241 For divorced women, maintenance (must be provided) honourably. (That is) a duty for those who fear God.

Al-Suyūṭī alone quotes from al-Ṭabarī this single report found nowhere else:

When "Provide maintenance for them honourably, the wealthy according to his means, the poor according to his means. (That is) a duty on those who do good" [2/236] was revealed, a man said: "If I wish to do good, then I will do it, but if I do not want that, I will not do it." So God revealed...[2/241]...<sub>1</sub>

The explanation that this sabab seems to provide is that "those who fear God" is the equivalent of "those who do good" but that it was necessary to make this explicit for some people in the community.

Al-Ṭabarī opposes this interpretation of the verse to two others: that the verse refers to non-virgin divorcees or to all divorcees.<sup>2</sup> By the context of 2/236, one may well presume that the sabab in fact constitutes the third possibility, that of virgin divorcees although al-Ṭabarī does not make this explicit. Regardless, al-Ṭabarī prefers the most general interpretation and thus does not discuss the significance of the sabab. The fact that the sabab is excluded from all other works consulted means that once again al-Suyūṭī has included minority material in his efforts to reach completeness.

Notes to 2/241

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 34; al-Ṭabarī V 264, report 5590.
2. Al-Ṭabarī V 262-265

2/245      Who is he who will lend God a good loan  
              so that he may multiply it for him many times?  
              God takes and gives and to him you will return.

Only al-Suyūṭī cites a sabab for this verse:

When Q. 2/261 was revealed [ "The simile of those who spend their possessions in the way of God is like the simile of a grain of corn which grows seven ears (and) in each ear is a hundred grains of corn. So God multiplies for whom he will. God is all-persuasive, all-knowing" ] the prophet said: "Lord, increase my community!!" So...[2/245]...was revealed.<sub>1</sub>

No trace of this sabab is found in any other exegetical work consulted in this study.<sup>2</sup> The normal interpretation of the verse, that "lending God a good loan" is jihād through property rather than battle, is certainly not excluded by the sabab but nor is it explicated at all. The sabab remains peripheral to exegetical interest at best.

## Notes to 2/245

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 34.
2. See e.g., al-Qurṭubī III 237-243; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 230-232; al-Ṭabarī V 282-288; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 40a, cites a report concerning Ibn al-Daḥḍāḥ and implies that the verse was revealed about him whereas all other reports (e.g., in al-Ṭabarī) cite him as demanding explanations of the verse after its revelation.

2/256

There is no compulsion in religion.  
 The correct way is distinguished from the wrong.  
 He who disbelieves in the devils  
 and believes in God clings with  
 the secure bond that will not be  
 broken. God is hearing and knowing.

Three basic themes of asbāb reports present themselves in this significant verse, each resulting in a different legal deduction being made from the verse.

The most prominent report involved the Anṣār and their attempts to convert their children to Islam.

The verse was revealed about the Anṣār:  
 when a woman from the Anṣār became barren,  
 she used to swear to herself (that) if a child  
 was born to her, she would raise him as a Jew.  
 So when Banū'l-Naḍīr was expelled, there were  
 children from among the Anṣār among them and  
 (Banū'l-Naḍīr) said: "We will not release our  
 children!" So God revealed...[2/256]...<sub>1</sub>

A second major theme plots a similar situation of conversion from the previous religions:

The verse was revealed about a man from the Anṣār  
 from Banū Sālim ibn ʿAwf called al-Ḥuṣayn.  
 He had two sons who were Christians whereas  
 he was a Muslim. He asked the prophet: "Should  
 I not compell the two of them seeing as they  
 have rejected everything but Christianity?"  
 So God revealed this verse.<sub>2</sub>

Finally, a short reference is given to a case of conversion from a presumed paganism:

The verse was revealed about a man from the Anṣār  
 who owned a black slave named Ṣuḥayb. He forced  
 (Ṣuḥayb) to join Islam.<sub>3</sub>

All of these reports urge a single interpretation of the verse such that there should be no compulsion to join Islam. The difference between the first two reports and the third is significant for it reflects a



difference over whether or not the verse applies only to scriptuaries--that they should not be compelled to join Islam--or to all persons. This then relates to an abrogation dispute; is the verse abrogated by the command to fight the polytheists until they convert (i.e., āyat al-sayf) or does the verse apply to ahl al-Kitāb especially (as long as they pay the jizya) and thus was not abrogated? The asbāb information can, of course, be cited in order to support whichever side of the argument one wishes to take, although in the main it is the version of ahl al-Kitāb that is cited as proof of specification and not of total abrogation.<sup>4</sup>

## Notes to 2/256

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 35, first report; al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 76-77, first report, similar to second report, p. 77, and sixth report, p. 78; Berlin 3578, f. 14b, first and second report; al-Ṭabarī V 407-412; al-Jaṣṣās, p. 82; Hibat Allāh, p. 47; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 43a; al-Qurṭubī III 280.
2. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 34, second report; al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 77-78, fourth and fifth reports; Berlin 3578, f. 14b, third report; al-Ṭabarī V 409, report 5817, V 410, report 5819; al-Qurṭubī III 280.
3. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 77, third report.
4. E.g., al-Ṭabarī V 414-415; al-Qurṭubī III 280; on the whole passage see R. Paret, "Sure 2,256 lā ikrāha fī d-dīni. Toleranz oder Resignation?", Islam 45(1969) 299-300.

2/257

God is the guardian of those who believe.  
 He leads them out of darkness to the light.  
 Those who disbelieve, their guardians are the  
 demons who lead them out from the light  
 to the darkness--they will be the companions  
 of the fire--they will be the inhabitants  
 of it.

In trying to understand this perhaps deceptive, difficult verse, the exegetes were sure of one fact, that of the equation (perhaps metaphorical) of light with faith in Muḥammad and of darkness with disbelief. So, when reading the latter part of the verse, it was apparent that the people being talked about had faith at one time because "the demons" led them from light to darkness.

An attempted answer to the exegetical problem was provided, according to al-Suyūṭī only among the asbāb texts, by a report in the form of the sabab:

It was the people who believe in Jesus and the people who disbelieved in him. When Muḥammad was sent, those who disbelieved in Jesus, believed in (Muḥammad) and those who believed in Jesus, disbelieved in (Muḥammad). So God revealed this verse.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the Christians, who before Muḥammad stood in the light, through their rejection of Muḥammad moved into darkness and those who did not believe in Jesus, and who were thus in darkness, moved into the light upon acceptance of Muḥammad. The exegetes were well aware, I am sure, that not all Christians rejected Muḥammad, nor did all those who rejected Jesus accept Muḥammad; the function of the sabab is not to provide "historical" information but rather contextual exegesis. What would seem most significant in the interpretation of the verse is that there is a desire to maintain a unitary focus on the verse-unit. The necessity to interpret the latter part of the verse as a reference to Christianity

(or Judaism, in theory at least<sup>2</sup>) led to the desire to interpret the first part of the verse in terms of attitude towards Jesus as well.

## Notes to 2/257

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 35, second report; al-Ṭabarī V 426, report 5859; al-Qurṭubī III 283; al-Suyūṭī's first report (p. 35) equals al-Ṭabarī V 426, report 5860 but there is textual confusion (see note 3 in al-Ṭabarī);

"Guardian for those who believe" those who believed in Jesus. So when Muḥammad came to them they (believed) (disbelieved) in him. So God revealed this verse about them.

The texts vary as to whether they say believe or disbelieve, the confusion probably being a result of uncertainty about which part of the verse is being referred to; if "believed" is the reading, then the implication would be that Christianity before Muḥammad did not equal "light" a point which al-Ṭabarī explicitly contradicts (V 427).

2. See Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 43b, for a sabab with regard to the Jews, as typified by Ka'b ibn al-Ashrāf, as the movers from light to dark and 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām as the mover from dark to light (because, of course, he converted to Islam). This, of course, introduces the problem that at one and the same time Judaism is "light" for Ka'b but "darkness" for 'Abd Allāh. Also see al-Kalbī, p. 30, for the same glosses.

2/260

Indeed, Abraham said: "Lord show me how you gave life to the dead!"  
 He said: "Do you not believe?"  
 (Abraham) said: "Why yes, but to satisfy my heart...!"  
 He said: "Take four birds, then turn them to you. Then put a part of them in each hill and call them and they will come to you swiftly. Know that God is powerful and wise!"

For the curious mind, a reading of this verse will raise many questions; it certainly did for the classical exegetes. One major question was what was Abraham supposed to do with the birds? Was he supposed to kill them and cut them up and scatter them around? This is certainly the most popular explanation, although the verse says nothing about killing the birds. Perhaps he was just supposed to take whole birds to the various hills and they would fly back. But wherein is the test? Another question revolves around God's statement, "Do you not believe?" Did God not know? Another question, the one that the asbāb al-nuzūl informations tries to answer, is why did Abraham ask the question to begin with; why does Abraham need his heart to be satisfied? It is this situation to which God responds, sending down (nuzūl!) the instructions, due to Abraham's need or stimulus (sabab!).

A majority of the reports concerning Abraham's question revolves around his contemplation of the processes of nature; this situation brought the question to his mind.

Qatāda said...Abraham came upon a dead animal which the sea and land creatures were distributing among themselves. So he said: "Lord, show me how you bring life to the dead." Al-Ḥasan, 'Atā' al-Khurasānī, al-Dabbāk and Ibn Jurayj said that it was a corpse of a donkey on the shore of the sea; 'Atā' said: the lake of Tiberias (i.e., the Sea of Galilee). They all said: (Abraham) saw it, the land and sea creatures devouring it. When the tide came in, the fish and the sea animals came and ate from it; what fell off it became a part of the water. When the tide went out,

the beasts of prey came and ate it; what fell of it became a part of the land. When the beasts of prey left, the birds came and ate from it; what was dropped, it was part of the wind. When he saw that, Abraham was amazed at it and he said: "Oh Lord, you know that it amazes us. Show me how you will bring life to it so I may see it with my own eyes."<sup>1</sup>

Abraham's amazement leads him to question God, and God's response to him is as indicated in the Quranic verse. Another version of the same basic report has Satan put the evil question into Abraham's mind after witnessing the same events: "How can God gather together all these parts from all these bellies?" This question apparently troubled Abraham's heart, so he asked God.<sup>2</sup> As is true with all the reports for this verse, in no instance is there actually a connection between the revelation of the Qur'ān and the incident; what is being traced in these reports is the cause of God saying what he said: that is, in this specific incident, what caused Abraham to ask his question such that God said what he said.

The second major theme relates to Abraham's adventures with Nimrod; the account in al-Wāḥidī, credited to Ibn Ishāq, is also found in similar form in al-Kisā'ī's Qisṣa al-anbiyā'.

When Abraham argued with Nimrod he said: "(It is) my lord who gives life and brings death." (Q. 2/258) So Nimrod said: "I give life and bring death." (Q. 2/258) He then killed a man and set a man free and said: "I brought death to the former and gave life to the latter." Abraham said to him: "God gives life by restoring the soul to a dead body." So Nimrod said to him: "Have you witnessed that of which you speak?" He was not able to reply, "yes, I have seen it," so he turned to a different proof. Then he asked his Lord to show him giving life to the dead in order to settle his heart about the argument. So he (Abraham) informed him (Nimrod) of the witnessing and viewing (of the act of God).<sup>3</sup>

The reference in this story to the "different proof" may well be Abraham's demand of Nimrod to make the sun rise from the west if he is so powerful (i.e., Q. 2/258); this is an intermediate argument for the power of God which, according to this sabab, interrupts the flow of the overall argument between Nimrod and Abraham over life and death. The special quality of this sabab is its ability to continue the context of the Nimrod encounter from verse 258 onwards; while the first sabab develops in a minor way the theme of the donkey which God "clothes with flesh", the overall Nimrod context is lost in that version. The Nimrod sabab is clearly an effort at continual haggadic narrative.

A third option also disregards the context of the passage but tries to explain Abraham's question:

When God took Abraham as a friend, the messenger of death asked permission of his Lord to go to Abraham and tell him the good news of that. So he went and said: "I come to you bringing you good news that God has taken you as a friend." So he praised God and said: "What is the sign of that?" He said: "That God will answer your call and give life to the dead at your request." Then he proceeded on his way and left. So Abraham said: "Lord, show me how you gave life to the dead." He said: "Do you not believe?" He said: "Why yes, but in order to set my heart at ease by knowledge that you answer when I call and gave me what I ask for and that you have taken me as a friend."<sup>4</sup>

This sabab, rather cleverly, turns the focus to God: that is was God who put the whole matter to Abraham to begin with. This sabab illustrates clearly what is implicit in all the other accounts as well: that Abraham could not possibly have had any doubts in his faith and that the reason for his question was totally innocent. Theological motivation colours the asbāb material in this, as in other instances, but the main concern is for the good story and, in some cases, the narrative context.<sup>5</sup>



Finally, it is worth pointing out that the asbsence of this material from al-Suyūṭī's Lubāb follows from his definition of asbāb as compared with akhbār; al-Wahidī's inclusion of precisely this type of material is exactly what al-Suyūṭī objects to.

## Notes to 2/260

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 79, first report; Berlin 3578, ff. 14b-15a, third report (another possible version: a dead man); Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 44b, (donkey corpse); al-Ṭabarī V 485-486; al-Qurṭubī III 300, third report.
2. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 79-80, second report; al-Wāḥidī's third report, p. 80, is a comment of 'Ikrima on the same subject but with no reference to Abraham.
3. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 80, fourth report; al-Kisā'ī, Qisṣa al-anbiyā', pp. 134-135; Berlin 3578, f. 14b, second report; al-Ṭabarī V 487; al-Qurṭubī III 300, second report.
4. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 80-81, fifth report; Berlin 3578, f. 14b, first report, the angel named as 'Izrā'īl; al-Qurṭubī III 300, first report; al-Ṭabarī V 487-489.
5. Note al-Ṭabarī V 485 and the use of the term "sabab" of Abraham's question.

2/262

Those who spend their property in the way of God  
and follow what they give graciously  
and without injury, for them their reward  
is with their Lord. There is not fear in them,  
nor will they grieve.

An extended narrative is found in al-Wāḥidī and somewhat compressed in Berlin 3578 regarding two people who performed the archetypal deed suggested by this verse, of giving selflessly in the cause of Islam; the following is the version of Berlin 3578:

ʿUthmān provided equipment for the raid on Tabūk-- one thousand camels with pack-saddles and blankets and bequeathed Bi'r Rūma in Medina (to the Muslims). Ibn ʿAwf came to the prophet with 4,000 dirhams, one-half of his property, as a gift. (The prophet) said to him: "May God bless you for what you give and for what you keep. Oh Lord, ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān has pleased me! Be pleased with him!"... The prophet did not cease lifting his hands (i.e., paying tribute) until dawn broke. So the verse was revealed.<sup>1</sup>

As is stated in Berlin 3578, the sources of this report are Muqātil and al-Kalbī; in the former's Tafsīr it is found in full form, while in the tafsīr ascribed by some to the latter, the basic identification of the people involved is provided.<sup>2</sup> The account of ʿUthmān's gifts for the battle of Tabūk is included in the Sīra, and Ibn Hishām includes Muḥammad's statement requesting that God be pleased with ʿUthmān; the connection with the verse of the Qur'ān however is not made.<sup>3</sup> The case of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf is also found in the Sīra and is, thereby, made a lot clearer as to its significance. Ibn ʿAwf had given the money but had then been chastized by some who thought his gift ostentatious.<sup>4</sup> It is against this background that the revelation of the verse in response to that situation makes more sense although Ibn Ishāq does not make the connection with sūra 2 but rather makes it with Q. 9/79; we are perhaps once more in a situation

where the later exegetes are assuming knowledge of those kinds of incidents on the part of their audience and thus do not need to make the connection explicit. When viewed from this overall situation the sabab acts exegetically, elaborating "spending their property" and implying "their reward" while at least carrying along with it the connotations of the meaning of "graciously and without injury" when the whole background is taken into account.

Finally, Berlin 3578 once again cites a report which states that the verse is mutlaq, unconnected by a sabab, presumably in order to make easier the deduction that this is a general verse in intent.<sup>5</sup>

## Notes to 2/262

1. Berlin 3578, f. 15a; al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 81.
2. Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 44b and Khams mi'a āya, ff. 16a-16b; al-Kalbī, pp. 30-1.
3. Ibn Ishāq, Sīra II 518; also see al-Qurṭubī III 306.
4. Ibn Ishāq, Sīra II 551.
5. Berlin 3578, f. 15a.

2/267

Oh you who believe! Give of the good things which  
 you have earned and from what we have produced  
 for you from the earth.  
 Do not intend to give the corrupt things of it.  
 You would not take it unless you pretend not to see it.  
 Know that God suffices and is praiseworthy.

A number of simple reports and as well one more fully narrative in style are found for this verse which basically assert that the opposite act occurred: someone gave of "the corrupt things" before the revelation of the verse. Al-Wāḥidī gives the following, complete account:

The verse was revealed about the Anṣār, who, when the cutting of the date palms was done, took from the garden a bunch of dates and hung them from a rope, which was (tied) between the columns in the mosque of the prophet. The poorer emigrants ate from them. A man intended to include a bunch of inferior dates, thinking that it was possible for him (because) he was placing so many bunches (there). So the verse was revealed about he who did that: "Do not intend to give the corrupt things of it", meaning, the bunch which has in it inferior dates; if they are given to you, do not accept them.<sup>1</sup>

This report involves a gloss of "the corrupt things" as hashaf, "inferior" (dates) or, in other versions, radī', "bad". This is, without a doubt, one of the major functions of the sabab. But another point is made by Ibn al-ʿArabī based explicitly on the sabab: that the sabab indicates that the verse applies to all charity and not only to those gifts prescribed by law.<sup>2</sup> The sabab presents the gift as a freewill-offering and thus the verse is to be taken in that sense. It is noteworthy that while al-Jaṣṣāṣ<sup>3</sup> makes the same point, he does so not on the basis of the sabab, but rather by the wording of the verse, which implies within it no limitation of the kind of charity to begin with.

Further evidence of the undoubted halakhic importance of the sabab arises through the fact that there are other reports which make

exactly the opposite point. Al-Wāḥidī cites as his first report the following:

The prophet ordered the zakāt of the breaking of the fast (to be) a measure of dates. A man came with bad dates, so the Qur'ān descended.<sup>4</sup>

Here the focus is on a legally instituted charity which could well be taken as evidence (although it is not in the texts consulted) of the applicability of the verse to obligatory charity only. A similar intention may be implied in Muqātil's initial statement, introducing the first sabab, which states "The prophet ordered ṣadāqa (i.e., by this verse) before the verse ordering ṣadāqa was revealed", although that statement may be interpreted in various ways.<sup>5</sup>

## Notes to 2/267

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 82, second report; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 234; Berlin 3578, f. 15a; similar reports are found in al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 35, first report; al-Qurtubī III 321; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 45b; al-Ṭabarī V 559-560, reports 6139-6140, also 562-563, report 6148. Much shorter reports, just giving the basic plot of giving bad dates: al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 35, second report; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 458; al-Ṭabarī V 560-562, reports 6141, 6143, 6147; al-Wāḥidī, Wajīz, p. 78. Another short report concerning simply "cheap food": al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 35, fourth report.
2. Ibn al-ʿArabī I 234.
3. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 457.
4. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 81-82, first report; Berlin 3578, f. 15a; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 35, third report; also similar al-Ṭabarī V 561, report 6142.
5. Note al-Ṭabarī's use of sabab, V 559: "the verse was revealed fī sabab a man from the anṣār hanging up a bunch of inferior dates...".



2/271

If you expose charity, it is (still) good.  
 If you hide them and give them to the poor,  
 that is better for you and will act as an  
 atonement for you from your bad deeds.  
 God is aware of what you do.

One short, simple sabab is found for this verse in al-Wāḥidī  
 and Berlin 3578.

They said: "Oh prophet of God, is charity given  
 secretly better or charity given openly?" So  
 God revealed this verse.<sup>1</sup>

Involved in this sabab are simple glosses of the Quranic abdā  
 as ʿalāniya, "publicly" and akhfā as sirr, "secretly". These glosses  
 are common, for example in al-Ṭabarī<sup>2</sup> where they are not, however, put  
 in the form of a sabab. The sabab is of no concern to the major halakhic  
 dispute of this verse which revolves around whether this verse applies  
 to obligatory charity or freewill charity (the later being the common  
 opinion).

## Notes to 2/271

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 82 and Wajīz, p. 79; Berlin 3578, f. 15a; al-Kalbī, p. 31, the cited source of both asbāb books.
2. Al-Tabarī V 582-583; also Ibn al-ʿArabī I 236-237.

2/272

It is not incumbent on you to guide them;  
 rather God will guide whom he wishes.  
 What you give of good will be for your own souls,  
 while you do not give except to seek the face of God.  
 What you give of good will return to you  
 and you will not be wronged.

A whole series of asbāb reports is found for this verse, all of which explicates the point that the verse relates to the giving of charity as a whole; the most basic and most common report makes it clear:

The prophet said: "Only give to the people of your religion." God revealed: "It is not incumbent on you to guide them", so the prophet said: "Give to the people of the religions".<sup>1</sup>

Another more fully narrative account, trying to explain why the prophet would have said not to give to begin with, states that "the number of poor Muslims was increasing" so, rather than give to the ahl al-dhimma, the people were to give only to fellow Muslims. Then the revelation contradicted that.<sup>2</sup> Another report is similar but takes the focus off the prophet and also sees the recipients as polytheists rather than scriptuaries:

The Muslims did not like to give to the poor of the polytheists until this verse was revealed, whereby they were ordered to give to them.<sup>3</sup>

Further reports provide elaboration of both of these motifs. Muslims who had foster parents among the Jews were unsure whether to give gifts to their kin;<sup>4</sup> Asmā' bint Abī Bakr was unsure whether to give gifts to her still-polytheist grandparents (Abū Quhāfa and his wife).<sup>5</sup> The fact that these reports are transmitted without specification of the type of charity involved, allows al-Jassās to deduce, on the basis of the asbāb, that the rule applies only to freewill offerings and not prescribed charity; al-Qurṭubī agrees although he does not argue the point on the basis of the sabab.<sup>6</sup> So the sabab does act to define the halakhic point to a certain

degree; what it does not do, interestingly enough, is act to establish a contextual situation in combination with verse 271. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ has to argue that this verse is talking about charity in specific (and not, for example, about faith in general) and bases his argument on the assertion that the pericope starts with verse 271.<sup>7</sup> In some situations the sabab can act to combine verses and thus deliniate the pericope through various narrative means; in this case, however, it does not do so.

## Notes to 2/272

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 82-83, first report; Berlin 3578, f. 15b, fourth report; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 35, second report similar; al-Ṭabarī V 587-588, reports 6201, 6206; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 237; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 461.
2. Al-Qurṭubī III 337, first report, similar in second report; al-Ṭabarī V 588-589, report 6208, although the full text is missing and has been supplemented by Shākir through reference to al-Qurṭubī.
3. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 83, second report; Berlin 3578, f. 15b, first report; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 35, first report similar al-Ṭabarī V 587-588, reports 6202-6204, 6207; Ibn al-ʿArabī I 237; al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 461.
4. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 84, fourth report; Berlin 3578, f. 15b, third report; al-Ṭabarī V 588, report 6205; al-Qurṭubī III 337, third report.
5. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 84, third report and Wajīz, p. 79; Berlin 3578, f. 15b, second report; al-Qurṭubī III 337, fourth report; al-Kalbī, p. 32; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 46a.
6. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 561; al-Qurṭubī III 337.
7. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ I 461.

2/274      Those who give their possession at night  
and at day, secretly and in public,  
they will have their reward with their Lord.  
No fear will be on them nor will they grieve.

Two radically different, yet major, themes are found for this verse in the asbāb texts, neither of which particularly adds to the interpretation of this reasonably plain verse--a verse which repeats information from verses 262 and 271 in only slightly different form.

The first collection of reports for this verse centres around horses: giving them, using them in battle and feeding them.

He who commits himself with a horse in the way of God [i.e., in jihād], not committing himself hypocritically nor for the reputation, is of those who "Give their possession at night and at day."<sup>1</sup>

The Prophet said: "The person who gives himself on his horse in the way of God is like the enlarged person (enlarged) as if he were (full of) sadaqa."<sup>2</sup>

Being prepared to fight on one's horse means being committed full-time--night and day--to its upkeep and being ready for duty at all times, whether everyone else is aware of one's task or not; that seems to be the exegesis of the verse which is promulgated by the sabab.<sup>3</sup> Just why the verse should relate to horses and fighting is never made clear--it is certainly not dictated by the context; it may well be an interpretation which arose in response to the second major motif of reports.

'Alī ibn abī Tālib is the focus of the second motif and is featured in asbāb books as well as in al-Ḥaskānī's text. The fullest version of the basic report is the following:

'Alī had only four dirhams. He gave away one of the dirhams at night, one at day, one secretly and one publicly. The prophet said to him: "What has made you do this?"

He said: "(I did it) so that I would be worthy of God who has made a promise to me." The prophet said to him: "Now that is yours." So God revealed this verse.<sup>4</sup>

The sabab is, of course, a literal application of the verse, providing a haggadic context by which to view the verse and answering that perpetual question of why these specific four items (night, day, secret, public) are mentioned and not others.

One other version, recorded in Berlin 3578 and al-Ḥaskānī only, provides a slight variation of the ʿAlī report but seems to be more interested in emphasizing the merits of ʿAlī rather than exegeting the verse:

When God revealed: "For the poor who are limited in the way of God, incapable of journeying in the land, (give charity)..." [2/273], ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf sent many dinars to the people described (by the verse) while ʿAlī ibn abī Ṭālib sent, in the middle of the night, a load of dates. Of the two gifts, the one of ʿAlī was the most loved by God. So God revealed... [2/274]..., that is, during the day, publicly, the gift of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, and, at night, secretly, the gift of ʿAlī.<sup>5</sup>

Just why the gift of ʿAlī should be preferred is not stated and seems to go against the sense of the verse which equates all types of charity. The mentioning of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf is interesting, however, because he also figures in one final report given by al-Suyūṭī:

The verse was revealed about ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf and ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān in their giving to the needy army.<sup>6</sup>

This sabab is one of the accounts related above with regard to verse 262 for which verse al-Suyūṭī has no reports.<sup>7</sup> The similarity in phrasing between the two verses has undoubtedly led to cross-fertilization or just plain confusion, especially since the glosses provided for the vocabulary in verse 262 are the words actually used in verse 274.

Overall, these specific asbāb are not employed in halakhic situations, most of the matters brought up by this verse having already been covered elsewhere in the Qur'ān. The purpose of the asbāb here seems to be primarily haggadic elaboration with the possible influence of sectarian interests.



## Notes to 2/274

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 85, fifth report.
2. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 85, fourth report.
3. Also see the following reports: Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 84-85, first three reports; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 35, first report; Berlin 3578, f. 15b, fourth and fifth reports; al-Qurṭubī III 346-347; al-Ṭabarī unfortunately suffers from another lapse in the text.
4. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 86, eighth report and Wajīz, p. 80; al-Ḥaskānī I 109-115; Berlin 3578, f. 15b, first two reports; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, pp. 35-36, second report; al-Qurṭubī III 347; al-Kalbī, p. 32; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 46b.
5. Al-Ḥaskānī I 114, report 162; Berlin 3578, f. 15b, third report.
6. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 36, third report.
7. See above pp. 415-417.

2/278

Oh you who believe! Fear God and give up the usury remaining, if you are believers.

As may be expected, the asbāb information for this verse relates to establishing the background to the verse, especially the fact that there was someone who was indeed owed interest and thus the problem arose; the Qur'ān then responds to that situation.

Three basic reports are found, each identifying a different person (or tribe) who was affected by this ruling.

The verse was revealed about Banū 'Amr ibn 'Awf from Thaḳīf and Banū'l-Mughīra, who owed interest to Thaḳīf. When God gave victory over Mecca to his prophet, he released them from all usury. Banū 'Amr and Banū'l-Mughīra came to 'Attāb ibn Usayd the ruler of Mecca. Banū'l-Mughīra said: "We have been made the most unhappy of the people with regards usury. Why has it been released from all the people except us?" Banū 'Amr said: "Arrange a compromise for us so that we may have our money!" 'Attāb wrote about that to the prophet. So this verse (2/278) and what follows it was revealed.<sup>1</sup>

In some versions of this report<sup>2</sup> the actual members of Banū 'Amr are specified as Mas'ūd, Ḥabīb, Rabī'a, 'Abd Yālīl, Abū 'Amr and Banū 'Umayr although al-Suyūṭī separates identification of this into a separate report.<sup>3</sup>

The second report<sup>4</sup> concerns al-'Abbās ibn al-Muṭallib and 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān who advanced money for date cultivation but a poor crop forced the owner to promise to repay a greater amount later. The third report<sup>5</sup> concerns al-'Abbās and Khālīd ibn al-Walīd who were partners in the finance business. All these people were apparently owed money before the revelation of this verse but then the debt was, of course, cancelled. All these reports expose the same basic motivation of explicating the background to the verse without providing any information of halakhic value.

## Notes to 2/278

1. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 36, first report; similar reports are found in al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 87, first report; Berlin 3578, f. 16a, third report; al-Ṭabarī VI 23, report 6259; al-Qurṭubī III 363.
2. Al-ʿIrāqī, f. 10a; Muqātil, Tafsīr, f. 47a.
3. Al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 36, second report, attributed to al-Ṭabarī in whose text it is not to be found.
4. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 87, second report and Wajīz, p. 81; Berlin 3578, ff. 15b-16a, first report; similar to al-Ṭabarī VI 22-23, report 6250.
5. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 87, third report; Berlin 3578, f. 16a, second report. The figure of Khālīd also figures in an account found in Ibn Ishāq, Sīra I 414; al-Walīd, Khālīd's father, made his son promise to collect the interest owed to him by Thaḳīf after his death. The verse was then revealed about Khālīd. That this report is not repeated verbatim in any of the asbāb books is certainly strange.

2/280            If he [the debtor] is in difficulty,  
                  then (grant him) a delay until (it is) easy (for him).  
                  If you give charity, (it is) better for you,  
                  if only you knew.

Only one sabab is found for this verse; the report continues the saga of Banū 'Amr and Banū'l-Mughīra as related in the first sabab for verse 278. It is Muqātil<sup>1</sup> who makes the matter clear: verses 278 and 279 are the response which Muḥammad sent to 'Attāb concerning the situation of the usury. As a result, the following sabab arises for verse 280.

Banū 'Amr ibn 'Umayr said to Banū'l-Mughīra:  
 "Give us the principal and we will give you the interest." Banū'l-Maghīra said: "We are in difficulty today; let us delay until the dates ripen." They refused to postpone (it) for them.  
 So God revealed...[2/280]...<sup>2</sup>

So Banū 'Amr, it would seem, agreed to forget the interest (in response to verse 278) but still wanted their principal (ru'ūs amwālihim) which now Banū'l-Mughīra decided they could not repay.

Implicit in this sabab, and that would seem to be the point, is that the verse refers not to the repayment of usury--which after all, has been the topic of the pericope--but rather, to the repayment of all debts. The contrary view was argued by some; several reports are found in al-Tabarī to the effect that the verse was revealed specifically about usury.<sup>3</sup> But, as al-Nahās points out,<sup>4</sup> that makes little sense since usury has already been forbidden; a gloss in al-Tabarī of "until (it is) easy" as "death" is probably an attempt at maintaining the usury interpretation while recognizing the illegality of the situation to begin with.<sup>5</sup>

## Notes to 2/280

1. Muqātil, Tafsīr, ff. 47a-47b.
2. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, p. 88; Berlin 3578, f. 16a; al-Qurṭubī III 371; also see Ibn al-Arabī I 245; al-Jaṣṣās I 473.
3. E.g., al-Ṭabarī VI 30, reports 6277, 6279.
4. Al-Naḥḥās, pp. 83-84; also al-Jaṣṣās I 473.
5. Al-Ṭabarī VI 32, report 6288.

2/285

The prophet believes in what is revealed to him from his Lord, and the believers, each believes in God, his angels, his books, and his prophets. We do not distinguish between any of the prophets. They say: "We hear and we obey, (seeking) your forgiveness, our Lord, and to you is the return."

While the reports of the asbāb books all centre on this one verse, their actual concern seems to be to establish a progressive situation that proceeds from verse 284 through 286. Al-Wāḥidī, for example, cites three reports for the verse, yet all are basically the same. Verse 284 is revealed:

To God belongs what is in the heavens and the earth. Whether you show what is in your soul or hide it, God calls you to the reckoning of it. He forgives whom he will and punishes whom he will. God is powerful over all things.

The Anṣār or certain specific people --ʿUmar; Abū Bakr, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf and Muʿādh ibn Jabal--complain:

"We are charged with works which we cannot bear: prayer, fasting, jihād, charity and now God has revealed this verse to you and we are not able to do it!"

The Prophet then replies to his followers:

"Do you wish to say the like of what the people of the two books before you said?"

The reference is made explicit in some reports such that it is the statement reported in Q. 2/93 "We hear and we disobey" made by the Israelites to Moses. The Anṣār, of course, reply: "No, we hear and we obey!" How exactly the actual revelation of the verse 285 then fits in at this point is never made explicit but it is presumably the revelation made by God confirming that he acknowledges the faith of his prophet and the believers. With this evidence of faith the revelation of verse 284 is rescinded (abrogated) and replaced by verse 286.

God charges no soul except for its capacity;  
to it is what it earns,  
against it is what it merits.

Thus the Anṣār are relieved of responsibility for doing what they are unable to do, a responsibility implied by verse 284.<sup>1</sup>

The controversy rages, of course, as to whether the verse is actually abrogated or not; there is little doubt, however, that all the asbāb reports are designed to encourage the position that it is. This is one clear instance of asbāb material which orders the revelation of verses for abrogation purposes. Al-Ṭabarī cites a total of twenty-five such reports,<sup>2</sup> only to end up rejecting them in favour of seeing all the verses as binding.<sup>3</sup> In al-Nahḥās, the sabab is not even cited, the author arguing throughout against its abrogation.<sup>4</sup> One reason for the rejection of abrogation is made explicit also by al-Jaṣṣāṣ: the verse does not actually contain legal material and thus is not open to abrogation.<sup>5</sup>

## Notes to 2/285

1. Al-Wāḥidī, Asbāb, pp. 88-89--this account follows his first report; also see: Berlin 3578, f. 16a; al-Suyūṭī, Lubāb, p. 36, only one report; al-Qurṭubī III 427; Muqātil, Tafsīr, ff.48a-48b.
2. Al-Ṭabarī VI 103-112 (ad 2/284).
3. Al-Ṭabarī VI 115 (ad 2/284).
4. Al-Naḥḥās, pp. 87-88; cf., however Hibat Allāh, pp. 27-28.
5. Al-Jassās I 537.



## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSIONS

#### THE ROLE OF ASBĀB AL-NUZŪL IN EXEGESIS

The preceding chapter has surveyed the exegetical use made of asbāb al-nuzūl information in 107 verses of sūra 2; these 107 verses are those for which books devoted to the genre of asbāb al-nuzūl provide such information. The purpose of the preceding analysis has been to try to isolate the exegetical methodology implicit in the whole phenomenon of the sabab: how have Muslims seen this information as relevant to their overall exegetical task? Previous studies have suggested that establishing a "chronology" was the major role for this information along with providing tangible situations in which legal deductions could be made from a given Quranic injunction. For this reason, works in the genres of ahkām, naskh and haggadic tafsīr were selected for major analysis.

The actual results of the analysis, however, are substantially different from those anticipated and assumed by previous scholarship.

One initial point is worth emphasizing; the notion of what a sabab actually is, according to the exegetes, has most certainly evolved over the centuries. It would seem to be true that the initial definition of sabab was a mechanical one; the phrase nazalat fī, seen to postulate a connection between external events and the content of God's revelation, served to define the notion of the sabab. This is certainly the implication of the treatment of Q. 2/79, where the difference between "exegetical" reports and asbāb reports is simply the absence of this critical phrase. However, with al-Zarkashī and most emphatically al-Suyūṭī, the notion of the sabab is seen to change; with these two, an insistence is made upon a connection

between external events and the act of revelation. As a result, al-Suyūṭī consistently excludes the reports which posit a connection with the historical past, prior to the actual act of revelation of the Qur'ān (although connected in content). This exclusion occurs in al-Suyūṭī ad Q. 2/75, 102, 138, 168 and 260.

Given this understanding of the basic nature of the asbāb reports, it is possible to isolate the predominant exegetical function of the material. The major role that the sabab plays is what could be called a "haggadically exegetical" function; regardless of the genre of exegesis in which the sabab is adduced, the major role of the sabab is to provide a narrative account in which the exegesis of the verse is embodied. The techniques of incorporating glosses, masoretic clarification, narrative expansion and, most importantly, contextual definition predominate within the overall structure of the sabab.

Exegetical glosses provided within the narrative context of the sabab have been noted many times: Q. 2/1-2, dhālika'l-kitāb as either the Qur'ān or the Torah, 2/44 birr as sunna, 2/142 wasat as 'udūl and so forth (see also Q. 2/178, 208, 214). Closely aligned to the lexical content of the sabab is the concern for more literary matters, as in the resolution of ellipsis in Q. 2/215. Disputes over variant readings in Q. 2/119, 125 and 158 are a basic masoretic matter debated in asbāb literary form.

Narrative expansion of a Quranic verse is a more frequent feature in the sabab, ranging from the most simple setting of the scene to a full elaboration, spinning an entire narrative structure around a Quranic verse. Often such elaborations revolve around polemical motifs--disputation

over sectarian emblems, over the respective values of each religious tradition, over merits of prophets and scriptures, over tahrīf, kitmān and hypocrisy. All these motifs, and many more, are familiar from Wansbrough's analysis of the Sīra literature<sup>1</sup> and are illustrated in the above analysis in passages such as Q. 2/104, 108, 130, 135, 150, 174 and 186 most especially.

Other elaborations are not so much polemical as illustrative of the desire to create a good yarn; nowhere is this more apparent than in Q. 2/260 and Abraham's questioning, but is also evident in Q. 2/62, 189a, 196a and 215.

The notion of ta'yīn al-muḥam is, of course, closely related as well, and is most obviously seen in examples where identification is made of the Quranic "they" which is so frequently left ambiguous in the text, as in, for example, Q. 2/80, 116 and 222. As Nwyia has stated,<sup>2</sup> the "horror of the uncertain" is the prime motivation in haggadic exegesis, and the sabab seems to be a particularly favoured and appropriate literary form in which to incorporate such information and thereby quiet restless minds.

It is this kind of interpretation of the motivation behind the citation of the sabab which would seem to explain best the resolution of metaphorical language by means of the sabab, displayed most clearly in Q. 2/19-20 but also in 2/174. Now, it may be tempting for some to understand the exegetical procedures connected with the sabab as being designed to promote the interpretation that what is stated in the Qur'ān "really happened" and that the sabab is the proof of this fact--that is, that the sabab is a historical referent and was understood in that way by early Muslims. This, however, may well be a misunderstanding based on reading too many modern concerns into medieval literature. Rather, viewing

the asbāb (especially in the case of resolution of metaphorical language but in most other cases also) as grounded in the basic haggadic notion of removing any ambiguity and of generating a story for repetition and (edifying) entertainment would seem far more satisfactory.

Creating a story not only satisfies a haggadic impulse (along with providing opportunities for lexical and masoretic elaboration) but also performs a basic exegetical function of providing interpretational context and determining the limits of each narrative pericope. It has often been remarked that the Qur'ān lacks an overall cohesive structure (albeit that in that very fact may well lie the text's special literary power) and does not provide within itself many keys for interpretation. One of the very basic problems is that it is often impossible to tell where one theme or pericope ends and the next one begins. This is most clearly indicated in the exegetical flurries in the form of asbāb reports that alight around Q. 2/113-121. The questions posed by the exegetes are: is this one section? does the one section have the same referent (be it Jews, Christians or pagans)? Those who wish to make legal deductions from Q. 2/115 are forced to break up the pericope and see the referent of the passage as varying; others, from the opposing camp, attempt to maintain one narrative context throughout and downplay any legal implications (or see such as an additional "level" in the reading). The sabab plays a central role in supporting exegetical decisions regarding the establishment of context; note, however, that in most instances that were treated above, the sabab information is far too varied and flexible to allow decisions to be based primarily upon it--rather, the exegete clearly makes the decision on the interpretation and supports it ex post facto with the appropriate sabab.

Other prominent examples of the primacy of establishing exegetical context occur in Q. 2/1-26, 99-105, 145 ff., 153 ff., 177 and 280 where, in fact, the sabab is employed to defeat the context.

An extension of this haggadic notion in the role of the sabab is to be detected in a seeming halakhic context as well, that of providing the Jāhilī background to verses of apparent legal intent. Such asbāb reports do not, in general at least, function to provide a context from which legal deductions can be made; rather they answer the naturally curious (haggadic) question of why does the Qur'ān say to do (or not to do) such-and-such a thing? Why would anyone have done it (e.g., enter their houses from the rear as in Q. 2/189b) anyway? Numerous examples of this occur, for example in Q. 2/104, 158, 168, 178, 187, 189b, 197, 198, 199, 200, 222, 226, 228, 229, 231, 232 and 278. This adducing of the Jāhilī "foil" or background is probably the most significant element of the asbāb reports. Provided in these reports is an implicit evaluation of the Islamic dispensation: 'this is how things were before Islam but now Islam has arrived and things have improved substantially.' It is to be noted that it is through the complementary notion of the Abrahamic legacy of Islam that this hermeneutical device is able to function almost perfectly. What is carried over from the pagan age is then to be contrasted either positively (in the case of the Abrahamic legacy) or negatively (in the case of the Jāhilī foil) with the provisions of the Islamic dispensation.<sup>3</sup>

There is implicit in this adducing of the Jāhilī foil another at least potential function; this is made most explicit, as it happens, by Maimonides in his treatment of the Jewish law. One reason that Maimonides brings forth in order to provide an explanation of the legal regulations

in Judaism (over and above their rational worth) is that they serve to protect the Jews from foreign (i.e., pagan) influence.

You will know from the repeated declarations in the Law that the principal purpose of the whole Law was the removal and utter destruction of idolatry and all that is connected therewith, even its name, and everything that might lead to any such practices, e.g., acting as a consulter with familiar spirits, or as a wizard...<sup>4</sup>

Only through detailing pagan practice can the accomplishment and the protection implicit in Jewish law be rationally perceived.

Meat boiled in milk is undoubtedly gross food, and makes overfull; but I think that most probably it is also prohibited because it is somehow connected with idolatry, forming perhaps part of the service, or being used in some festival of the heathen... This I consider as the best reason for the prohibition...<sup>5</sup>

Maimonides, of course, faced problems when he had to deal with an obvious continuation of pagan practice in Judaism, most especially with sacrifice; his only rationale was that sacrifice as a religious rite was too popular to be immediately abolished although eventually it too would be declared a part of the pagan heritage (as indeed it became with the destruction of the Temple). Maimonides did not have available to him the exegetical tool with which Muslims were able to approach their legal structure, that of the Islamic-Abrahamic heritage that could be postulated for a continued pagan practice under the new dispensation. Of course, Muslims then faced the problem of determining exactly what was Abrahamic and what was not, and this problem is nowhere more clearly illustrated than in the various traces of totally opposing opinions which are recorded in the asbāb information, as, for example, in Q. 2/158. Still the basic point remains that the production of a Jāhilī background provides a measure by which Islam is evaluated and provides evidence of the protection and of the sense of identity which Islam entails.

Within this notion of the Jāhili background there has been noted several times the flexibility of the identity of the Jāhili opponents; both Jews and pagans perform the function in Q. 2/8, 23, 26, 104, 106, 108, 178 and 222. This would seem to indicate a mixing of apologetic (i.e., as implied in the "evolution" of Islam away from paganism) and polemic (i.e., taḥrīf on the part of the Jews) concerns and in no way can this really be seen to affect the understanding of the basic purpose of such exegesis.

Now all the above cited functions of the sabab are interrelated in their basic haggadic nature, and, indeed, this would seem to be the predominant aspect in all asbāb reports. It would, however, be totally incorrect to gloss over the situations where quite clearly the asbāb do have a halakhic value as argued by Wansbrough although, even there, whether the chronological aspect is primary, as has been the general assumption, would seem to me to be quite doubtful.

A number of instances have been noted, most predominantly Q. 2/115, where "germ" haggadic asbāb material has been expanded towards specific halakhic ends, either by providing a context in which the verse may be interpreted halakhically (as in Q. 2/115) or by providing an example of the application of a law as found in the Qur'ān (as in Q. 2/196b; other examples are Q. 2/187, 194, 198, 232, 256 and 272). The sabab also may serve to deflect exegetically an apparent halakhic content of a verse as in Q. 2/45, 79, 150 and 177; on the other hand, asbāb which seem to have halakhic content are on occasion apparently not employed in exegesis in that way, for example in Q. 2/230.

It is within discussions of naskh that one intuitively expects to find the majority of the discussions about chronology and one also expects that such discussions will centre around asbāb reports; indeed, this was

an emphasized point within most previous scholarly discourses on asbāb. In very few cases, however, was that discussion about chronology and asbāb ever carried on in the verses that were examined, at least on an overt level (see Q. 2/104 and 285). While it cannot really be doubted that there is an implicit assumption of the chronological-progressive order of the Qur'ān in the naskh texts, it is notable that the discussions themselves do not make this point explicit; as was pointed out on several occasions, naskh, be it with regards to wine or direction of prayer, always assumes that the present law is known (that is, no wine and facing Mecca), and the verses which agree with that fact are necessarily the valid ones. Any verses which contradict this are necessarily invalid, and thus can be logically arranged according to a basic notion of "progressive revelation". The arguments on naskh are, in short, based on logic not chronology. Where that logic needs backing up on terms of specifics, appeal is made, at least in the one example noted above, to the ordering of sūras and, once again, not asbāb information. Of course, these two notions (the ordering of sūras and the asbāb) interact through the adducing of the "sabab" regarding the qiyāsī method of sūra ordering at Q. 2/21. Even there, however, the connection is deflected by al-Wāhidī at least who suggests that the sabab refers to the people who are addressed (that is, the Meccans or the Medinans) and not the place (and therefore the time!) of revelation. To emphasize the point once more: the bringing forth of the asbāb as explicit proof of "progressive revelation" is not done nor, note, does it figure in al-Suyūṭī's list of theoretical functions of the sabab as dealt with in Chapter II above.<sup>6</sup>



Given all these facts, then, the question must be raised of why does an exegete such as al-Qurṭubī adduce asbāb reports in virtually every possible case and with every possible variant? Of course, the understanding may be that the sabab will perhaps be relevant, and thus it must be included in the treatment of each verse. However, it is quite possible that another factor is at play also, and that is the continuing uṣūl controversy; al-Qurṭubī (for example) finds it necessary to assert continually the relevance (and in fact the necessity) of the sunna in interpretation of the Qur'ān and in the elaboration of the law and this he does by continually citing the asbāb material. While the Qur'ān may well, in theory, be placed as the primary source in the hierarchy of legal debate, the power of the sunna is forever encroaching upon it, much to the objections of many theorists.<sup>7</sup>

Al-Zarkashī also raises this basic issue of why the sabab is always adduced and, as he emphasizes, why it is always adduced first. His basic response is to state that often the sabab determines the contextual pericope (wajh al-munāsaba) and thus must be given primacy.<sup>8</sup> That, however, hardly explains why it should be adduced every possible time even when its relevance is not connected with the definition of the context.

One further matter which appears not to have arisen in the above examination of Sūra 2 is the explicit question of prophecy; is prophecy in the Qur'ān not closely interrelated with chronology and asbāb? In the polemical text of Ibn Kammūna, a list of ten verses from the Qur'ān which are traditionally claimed to be prophecies is adduced; cited in it is Q. 2/61, which states in reference to the Jews, "Struck upon them was

humiliation and poverty", about which the argument runs: "[the truth of] this became clear from the fact that after this word no forceful power appeared among the Jews."<sup>9</sup> Now the precise "prophetic" sense of this passage is admittedly vague, but it is worthy of note that no sabab is found in the asbāb texts to support the necessary chronology and interpretation of the assertion. Once again, as far as the verse-prophecy is concerned, the fact is known and not in need of proof. In addition, two instances were noted in the analysis above (Q. 2/142, 189a) where the sabab appears to deflect exegetically possible prophetic qualities in the verses concerned.

In comparison with al-Suyūṭī's assessment of the role of the asbāb as detailed in Chapter II above, it must be noted that it would seem that al-Suyūṭī has overstated the sabab's halakhic relevance although, on the other hand, he has assessed accurately without a doubt some of the actual roles played. Much of his treatment, it will be recalled, centred upon discussions of specification by the sabab; this arose in four places in sūra 2 (verses 114, 115, 159 and 168) where all exegetes agreed that specification (that is, that the sabab may imply a legal limitation in application) could not be asserted by the sabab alone; the ma'nā or lafz of the verse was always considered more important than the sabab. This, of course, makes perfect sense with the understanding that, after all, the sabab has its primary focus in embodying an interpretation of the verse in question rather than representing any "external reality".

One final point needs to be emphasized. Al-Suyūṭī stated that one of the main functions of the sabab is the theological one: to confirm the divine status of the Qur'ān and to witness God's concern for mankind. This, it seems to me, is a profound and subtle statement which displays an

understanding that underpins the entire phenomenon of the sabab: the sabab acts as a constant reminder of God and is the "rope" by which man's contemplation of the Qur'ān may ascend to the highest levels even while dealing with the mundane aspects of that text. In that sense, the sabab is quite accurately understood as a basic haggadically edifying device finding its origin in popular, pious elaboration of the Qur'ān.

## Notes to Chapter IV.

1. SM Chapter 1 and see above Chapter III A pp. 68-69.
2. Exégèse Coranique et langage mystique, pp. 60-67 and above Chapter III A pp. 65-66.
3. The dichotomy is not perfect; Q. 2/158 provides an example of a third category occurring through the statement "there is no sin on you..." with regards to the continuation of pagan habits. Such a category was however even less vigorous than the Abrahamic (which itself gets watered-down by the flexibility of the identification of Muhammad's opponents) as the discussion in Q. 2/158 demonstrates in that it was unclear whether in fact the practice took place in pagan times or not.
4. Moses Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, (trans. Friedlander) p. 317; the basic point was made in pre-Islamic times as well, e.g., in the Letter of Aristaeas.
5. Maimonides, Guide, p. 371; also see Menahem Haran, "Seething a kid in its Mother's milk", Journal of Jewish Studies, XXX (1979) 23-25.
6. The desire to see a connection between the asbāb and chronology as such may be a modern one, induced by modern notions of history. See the ideas put forth in A. Falatūri, "Experience of time and history in Islam", in A. Schimmel, A. Falatūri (eds.), We Believe in one God, pp. 68-69.
7. See QS 176-176 on obliteration of the distinction between law and scripture as the actual function of the asbāb.
8. Al-Zarkashī, al-Burhān I 34.
9. Ibn Kammūna, An Examination of the Three Faiths, text p. 87, trans. p. 127.

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